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ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN ADULT LITERACY: ANALYSIS OF A STUDY CIRCLE SUPPORT GROUP

A Dissertation Presented

by

JOAN DIXON

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ABSTRACT

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN ADULT LITERACY: ANALYSIS OF A STUDY CIRCLE SUPPORT GROUP

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Although the need for staff development in adult literacy is no longer questioned, there is still an open debate regarding how to design effective approaches, how to coordinate the relationship between research and practice, and how to define the knowledge base that constitutes adult literacy education. This study examines these issues from the perspective of community-based literacy programs where literacy is defined by functions and uses in the social context of actual communities rather than in terms of discrete reading and writing skills. The vehicle for collecting information was a study circle support group comprised of practitioners from a community-based literacy program in Massachusetts.

The purpose of this study is to identify guiding principles for designing staff development for community-based literacy programs through analyzing how practitioners identify important issues and articulate theory within their own descriptions and analysis of daily practice. Staff development principles were identified through analyzing the study circle process in terms of how the group defined its task, used

different forms of talk, approached the use of expert texts and dealt with changing constraints of time. Findings reveal that practitioners need a forum to define their own staff development task and discuss how to blend theory and strategies with expectations, input and abilities of students inside a changing learning environment.

When practitioners discuss their practice, they combine many forms of talk including story telling, hypothesis forming, self-observation, problem solving, strategy analysis, meaning making and topic discussion. This multi-faceted way of talking results in a rich, contextualized analysis of real-life problems that is different from the generalized theories and skills of traditional staff development. The following guidelines resulted from this study. Staff development should

1. build theory from practice,
2. focus on problem posing and solving,
3. be based on authentic experience,
4. be embedded in the social context of actual programs,
5. be on-going and flexible to incorporate emerging issues,
6. have program development as its goal,
7. be connected to a larger system that is working for structural change.

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INTRODUCTION

As adult illiteracy has become a "crisis" worthy of attention in the political and economic arena in recent years, many new initiatives have emerged in response to the growing demand for basic literacy services. These initiatives include government funded programs such as student literacy corps, family literacy and workplace literacy as well as the expanding volunteer response to local need ranging from individual efforts by community groups and churches to the expansion of national networks such as Laubach and Literacy Volunteers of America. The majority of these efforts whether they have government funding or not, rely heavily on the ideas and creativity of willing volunteers, school teachers and professionals from a variety of fields (including adult education in some cases). They also have one other thing in common: they are largely unaware of the full complexity of the literacy situation they are walking into.

While many programs are able to define and achieve their success within narrow definitions of literacy as a concrete set of skills and achievement tests, many volunteers and teachers are running into major problems ranging from how to diagnose and deal with learning disabilities or low self-esteem to how to keep learners coming in the face of child-care, housing, employment and other social needs that surround and intermesh with the literacy needs. There are very few resources for adult literacy programs and practitioners[1] that help them deal with the range of issues they face in working with adult

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[1] The term practitioners refers to all the people who work in an adult literacy or basic education programs. In addition to the teachers there are also program directors, facilitators, volunteers, trainers, materials developers, counselors and other staff involved in the development of adult literacy programs.

literacy learners. As a result, there is a tremendous need for expanding the resources and strategies to provide staff and program development support for "professional" adult literacy educators as well as for volunteers.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, staff development for adult literacy education has entered the agenda of policy-makers and researchers with the Southport Study (1988), the National Literacy Act of 1991, and the Pelavin Study of ABE/ESL Instructor Training (1991). While the need for professional and staff development programs in the field of adult literacy is no longer questioned, the issue of how to fund and deliver it is still up in the air. Furthermore, there is still an open debate regarding how to design effective staff development approaches, how to coordinate the relationship between research and practice, and how to define the scope of literacy education and the knowledge base that constitutes the field. According to Lytle et al. "there is a dearth of rich, empirical studies of staff development programs in action (especially information about local and program site-based efforts)" (1992a, p.6-7).

Purpose of the Study

In this dissertation, I have attempted to provide an in-depth study of a program-based staff development approach that examines the issues of design, research, practice and the scope of literacy education from the perspective of practitioners in a community-based literacy program. Such programs define literacy more broadly by connecting it to the social context and real-life issues of the community where it is located rather than limiting the definition to the discrete skills of reading and writing in order to pass

performance tests. For this study, I worked as a researcher and staff development resource person with practitioners from The Literacy Project, a community-based literacy program in western Massachusetts, using an approach to staff and program development that I have named a study circle support group. The purpose of this study is to understand the theory and practice of community-based literacy from the perspective of practitioners who are engaged in the work on a daily basis in order to identify guiding principles for designing staff development experiences and support systems.

Since the voices and insights of practitioners are essential to understanding the breadth and depth of community based literacy, I have chosen to introduce this dissertation with an extended conversation edited from one of the study circle sessions. In this session, we brought up the idea of documenting The Literacy Project as a way to help outsiders understand the components, activities and philosophies that make up a literacy program. It wasn't easy, even for a group of experienced insiders, to assemble all of the information.

Louise: I can't imagine what it would take to do all that. If you think about the extent of what we do. From the concept of what Phil does for the good of the program and then what Alex does and then what each one of us does and then the volunteer part, what they contribute, because they certainly contribute important pieces. And the students, the things that have to happen to fit the ways the students contribute. I don't know what that's going to look like. I'm serious, because I don't think it can be Heading A. I went down to Springfield a month ago and there were about 20 practitioners from real small community programs and basically they wanted to know about The Literacy Project, that they had heard about us and could I come down and meet with all these people. And I did. It was so bizarre. I sat in this room with about 20 people and they were firing questions at me. I just thought I would give them sort of an overview of like this is what we do and how we do it. For everything that I said, they kept firing questions at me, like very specific things like when you get a

student how do you do this and when do you start a student. I came out of there thinking none of those people have a clue what they are doing. I mean they really didn't. . . . I can't imagine how it would be done because I answered everything from what kind of a room do you use to the philosophy of your program, do you use tables, desks? It covered like into funding, like where does your money come from and why do you only apply for this kind of money?

Phil: And the thing is you can't codify everything. Teaching is an art, not a science. I really believe that. You can't say this is how you do it, because there isn't a how you do it. But there are certain quid pro quos, there are certain things that you have to have in order to make things work and there are certain basic assumptions that you have to start with. The question is how does that play out for us. I'm not sure that any one of us, even me, could answer that, cause it plays out four different ways[2] for one thing and that's a given. And the question is how do those four different ways fit together and I think they do fit together, but they certainly are different as well. That's what we were talking about. How do we in some way document who we are, not really what we are doing, but who we are.

Joan: I think Louise's comment that it's so complex, how do we begin to do it, is valid. And I think that's why I'm looking at it in terms of "The Literacy Project Talks About Itself." The things that get said in these meetings are really interesting. . . . That you go through an hour of just talking around and then all of a sudden, some really interesting insights into how decisions get made or things that happen get spoken by this group. If we can pull those out. I think it's the kind of spirit of who you are and what you do that other programs, out there looking at you and trying to figure out what it is you are doing, don't see. People are asking all the questions around it, but what are those moments of insight?

Phil: They're looking for a formula and it's actually magic.

Louise: Do you remember when we first started doing staff development? It was like none of us were convinced that we knew what we were doing. That's what we were looking for. We were looking for this kind of like formula that was gonna - this is how we do it, we do this, this and this and then it happens. And we finally came to the realization two years later that we sort of did know what we were doing. And it wasn't a this, this and this. It was sort of a "do this and then hopefully the other, you just sort of have to go from there."

[2] The Literacy Project has four sites based in four different towns in western Massachusetts.

Phil: It just sort of evolves.

Louise: That's what I mean.

Phil: David has completely changed what he is doing and that's going to continue to evolve. The next class you run will be different from this one and that's as it should be.

Michele: So, back to what you were saying about who we are and what we're doing. How are you differentiating between the two, because I see the two as actually being as one.

Phil: I think they are. I guess I'm sort of talking about the same thing Louise was just now. That people want to know what we're doing and by that they mean all of these technical [things], and that's not really the issue. The issue has to do with how we approach what we're doing more than anything else I think. To some extent it's a function of certain philosophical things, obviously there's a philosophical base, we're talking about Whole Language and all of those things that influence how that happens. But clearly, it can happen in different ways. And what's important is the basic approach which is who we are, not what we do, I think. When I say who we are, I don't mean only who we are as individuals, but who we are as an organization. Which is in turn a dynamic of how all the individuals interact.

Judy: There's a piece of this that reminds me of cross-cultural work. When you go into another culture and you try to figure out how do you learn "about" another culture, it's actually how do you learn "from" another culture, which is a really different way of looking at it. Even the perspective of being like you're saying the outsider wanting to know what we do, it's going to take the outsider experience with us to even figure out what are the questions to ask. Just even learning how do you even phrase it, already means you have some insight as to what we're all about. So it would be interesting if someone asks us the question, "What questions should I ask." And we try to figure out what are the questions that tell people, that could tell people who we are. And it sounds like we're suggesting some of them, what is our process, who are we - I mean big ones. I don't know if that makes sense, but when I was doing cross-cultural work, we were often doing into that kind of thing to figure out what's going on. . . . For any culture to say this is who we are is an incredibly hard thing to do because you have to step out of self to see self.

Joan: I was thinking of that when Louise was talking about this group asking questions. How did they know what to ask and were their questions answerable? Were some of their questions impossible to answer because they weren't framed in a way that made sense from the inside.

Louise: Yeah, I sort of sat there - The picture I got in my head as I was sitting there listening to them and trying to answer, some of them were so bizarre, like do you use desks or tables. But it's like all I could think, "these are all people who are doing adult ed." Real small, one was a program in a church - 10 people. But the picture that I sort of had running through my mind was here are all these people who are out there trying to do what we're doing and are just sort of grasping at here's someone, a program that's supposed to know, because somebody told them. And the other thing that struck me was that none of these people knew of The Literacy Project but this women knew it and got in touch with all these people. All of these people came in with the same kind of expectations that I used to go to conferences and workshops with. . . . Some of the questions were like when I first started to work I wanted to know too - why do we have this round table?, that kind of stuff. [5:1:153-343]

As a practitioner researcher facilitating this study circle and later analyzing the process of oral inquiry in action, I was struck by how difficult it is to pinpoint and articulate the details of good practice. Phil knows there are certain things they need to make the program work, but he's not sure he can describe exactly how they play out in practice at the four different sites where The Literacy Project operates. As facilitator, I know there were profound moments of insight in the discussions, but in searching through the transcripts, I had difficulty locating the "quotable quotes" I thought I remembered. Judy's observation about the process of figuring out what questions to ask and how difficult it is to step outside yourself and see how you are doing something and why you are doing it that way, points out a pathway for our inquiry, but doesn't give easy answers.

The study circle support group provided a time and a place for us to engage in an on-going conversation about practice. I was working with experienced practitioners, not training beginning teachers; yet the complexity of their task as their program made an organizational shift from a learner-centered approach to a group and community-based approach constantly highlighted the fact that staff-development is an on-going necessity in the field of adult literacy education.

Doing adult literacy in a way that is connected to learners' lives and the real-life functions and uses of literacy is a complex, create-the-program-as-you-go process. It involves constantly figuring out how to put theories of participatory curriculum development into practice with new groups of learners who expect top-down teacher planned lessons. It involves analyzing every aspect of program management as well as the classroom practice in order to honestly involve adult learners in all aspects of program development. It involves constantly learning from learners, assessing their learning style, and designing and evaluating learning activities that incorporate learner input. It requires practitioners to not only be creative in designing learning activities, but to also be to able to explain their practice to each other and to their students. The study circle provided a place to learn to articulate the process and to analyze the intuitive decisions, actions and relationships that went into creating a literacy learning experience.

My experience over the past five years working with many different practitioners in staff development activities has continually impressed on my mind the importance of the ability to articulate assumptions, processes and practices. According to Royce, "Literacy educators who can clearly articulate their own stance, name their own world

and tap the sources of their own creativity are better prepared to develop programs, provide instruction, and model principles of self-directed learning and empowerment" (1991, p.1). Such an ability is particularly crucial in community-based literacy programs. Because the knowledge and practice base of the field is just emerging and because the existing theories stress the importance of building curriculum based on the experience of the learners and their local situation, practitioners must be able to develop their own theory and practice.

Gaber-Katz and Watson point out that "the theory of community-based literacy is developed in tandem with, and emerging from, the practice" (1991, p.2). Throughout this document, I will discuss the various ways that practitioners at The Literacy Project approached the development of practical theories. In the context of this study, theory is defined broadly as a framework that gives a conceptual dimension to practice and guides the development of practical educational strategies. In this process where theory is developing and emerging from daily practice, there are many levels and dimensions that will be more fully discussed in chapters V and VI.

While it is important for this study to document how The Literacy Project practitioners articulate what they are doing in terms of underlying theories or philosophies as well as strategies and practices, it is essential to realize that another program cannot simply pick up the document and duplicate the program. Each community-based literacy program has to embark on its own journey of developing its theory and practice in collaboration with their own teachers and learners and in response to issues, opportunities and constraints within the community and social contexts where

they work. For this reason, the present study is not merely an attempt to document the theory and practice of The Literacy Project, although examples of their practice and their attempts to articulate theory will be used extensively to illustrate what it means for a program to develop theory "in tandem with, and emerging from, the practice." Rather, the focus of this dissertation is to examine how a study circle support group can be used by community-based literacy programs as an appropriate vehicle for staff and program development.

Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter II, "Prevailing Trends in Staff Development", provides an overview of past and present staff development efforts and examines current research on effective staff development. The purpose of this overview is to document the lack of investment in staff development for adult literacy and identify prevailing assumptions and trends among those who fund research, and provide traditional staff development activities. Research to identify effective staff development approaches ends up being a mere academic exercise if the structural realities of the field of adult literacy are not seriously considered. Since the study circle support group is built on alternative philosophies and strategies, it is important to understand and critique the prevailing assumptions as well as the constraints and resources that have shaped the dominant thinking in regard to staff development approaches.

Chapter III, "Emerging Alternatives in Staff Development", examines some of the alternative approaches to staff development emerging from recent research and practice. The chapter is organized to answer three questions. 1) How can practitioners participate

in guiding staff development and creating a knowledge base for the field? 2) How can a non-linear staff development process be designed to support practitioners working in the complex social context of literacy education? 3) Is it possible to create functioning systems and/or organizations to provide a context, continuity and purpose for staff development?

Chapter IV, "Methodology" includes a discussion of the various research approaches which have influenced the design of both the study circle support group approach to staff development and the research for this dissertation. Since the study circle approach incorporates elements of participatory and practitioner research, the research techniques used in the staff development activity overlap and interact with the research techniques used for the dissertation. The chapter provides a systematic discussion of the various influences and layers of research approaches used in this study and encountered in the discussion of the findings.

Chapters V and VI are divided into four sections based on a framework, developed by Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1992), that was used to analyze the various aspects of the study circle support group. The four categories of the frame work are task, talk, text and time. In Chapter V, "The Literacy Project Talks About Itself: Identifying the Task," I describe the chronology of the study circle process and how our understanding of the task emerged from our discussion. Chapter VI, "The Literacy Project Talks About Itself: The Role of Talk, Texts and Time," examines the core process of the study circle where the concept of articulating theory and practice emerged as a vehicle for generating the content and process of a program-based staff development

process. This chapter also examines the role of texts, in terms of how the study circle group responded to expert texts and how they used their own experience as text or content for discussion. Finally, it examines issues of time and the reality of how long staff and program development take in terms of moving from ideas to action. This section also looks at how practitioners deal with the multiple constraints of time availability as well as how to coordinate the timing of real life with a planned syllabus.

Chapter VII, "Implications and Recommendations," looks at what implications our experience with the study circle support group has for future staff development efforts. It examines insights that were gained from listening to practitioners discuss their theory and practice in depth and how those insights can provide guidelines for designing more effective staff development. The chapter concludes with recommendations for improving staff development in the field of adult literacy.

CHAPTER II

PREVAILING TRENDS IN STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The term staff development refers generally to the professional training and educational opportunities available to practitioners in the field of adult literacy and basic education. The complex schedules of adult educators who often combine two or more part-time jobs in various configurations of evening and daytime courses present a considerable challenge those who organize such development activities. Consequently, most staff development in the field of adult literacy and basic education ends up taking the form of isolated workshop sessions on particular topics, usually teaching techniques.

However, for the purposes of this study, the definition of staff development is not merely a descriptive term for current practice. It is also a prescriptive term for what staff development in adult education should be and how it is different from teacher training and professional development. According to Leahy,

> Staff development differs from other forms of teacher training. The word "staff" by definition implies a linkage between changes in learner behavior and changes in the organizations of which they are a part. The primary purpose, therefore, of a staff development program is to improve the ability of both staff members and the organizations to respond to the changing demands of their shared work environment. Teacher training, on the other hand, focuses on the individual, provides learning experiences based on curricula content and skill needs, and is in line with the personal and professional goals of the individual. (1986, p.8)

In recent years, staff development for adult literacy has become more prominent in the awareness of policy-makers and funders. However, there is still a need to legitimize the field to the point that sufficient resources and career options are available to justify an investment in staff development programs which improve both the abilities

of practitioners and their organizations. A brief review of the history of staff development in adult education reveals that most so-called staff development opportunities have not provided coherent linkages with program development or even the development of a professional field. Most of the staff development activities over the years should probably be loosely classified as training (defined as content and skills offered to individuals by technical assistance organizations) or "professional" development (defined as something practitioners organize for themselves through reading, experimentation and attending conferences).

This chapter will look at prevailing trends and a variety of approaches to staff development beginning with a summary of the historical background of staff development for adult education in the U.S. The next section will examine the current state of staff development followed by a review of various approaches to selecting content for staff development. Finally, the last section will examine and critique recent research on effective staff development approaches.

Historical Background

A review of how the U.S. government has historically dealt with staff development from a national policy and funding perspective reveals a pattern of overlooking, underfunding and underestimating the extent of staff development needs at both the micro and macro levels. Over the years, there seems to be confusion as to where to place the resources so that implementation at the local level is consistently supported by trained and experienced staff development professionals. Table 2.1 shows where the U.S. Office of Education has located staff development resources over the past 40 years.

Table 2.1 History of Staff Development Efforts

date	legislation	institutions of higher ed	national	regional	state
1952	none	12-14 colleges and universities			
1964	Economic Opportunities Act		Ford Foundation funded Training of Trainers		Teacher Training
1965		17 institutions offered degrees			
1966	Adult Education Act (illiteracy is a concern)				
1964-68		60 Summer Institutes and weekend workshops			
1969				pilot project South East region of US	
1972-75	309B - Regional Centers	21 new graduate programs		10 Regional Centers established	
1975	310 Money for Special Demonstration Projects & Teacher Training				Staff Dev. moved from federal to state control

continued, next page

Table 2.1 continued

date	legislation	institutions of higher ed	national	regional	state
1978	Adult Ed Act amended: 10% of state grants for special projects & teacher training				
1988	Adult Ed Act amended to include evaluation of service delivery & R&D		Southport Study criticizes state of staff development		
1989	Student Literacy Corps	SCALE organized to help student volunteer programs	National Education Goal 5: Adult Literacy		SABES started
1990			National Center for Adult Literacy		
1991	National Literacy Act Reauthorized Adult Ed Act: increased teacher training/special projects to 15% (2/3 training)		National Institute for Literacy		
1991-93		22 Universities involved in Staff Development for Adult Literacy	Pelavin Associates conducts nation-wide staff development survey & national workshops		21 State Literacy Centers

(sources: Leahy, 1986; Tibbetts, et al., July 1991; Adult Education Act Silver Anniversary factsheet, USDOE)

Sporadic Efforts

According to Leahy (1986), prior to 1965, most training for adult educators was offered through summer institutes or weekend workshops. There were only 12-14 colleges and universities in the United States which offered degree training in adult education, so the vast majority of teachers were certified or retired elementary and secondary school teachers. In 1964, the Economic Opportunities Act legislated funding for teacher training at the state level. However, it didn't allocate any funding to prepare trainers to train the teachers. So in 1965, the Ford Foundation, in cooperation with the U.S. Office of Education, provided funding for three two-week workshops across the country. Participants trained at these workshops were expected to be able to train the teachers in their respective states. From 1964 to 1968, 4300 teachers, administrators and counselors were trained through sixty short term summer institutes and weekend workshops around the United States.

In the early seventies, the U.S. Office of Education funded 10 regional adult education staff development projects. During this time period, much attention was given to research and writing about staff development in adult education. The difference between teacher training and staff development was identified, assumptions about staff development being linked to organizational change and program development were described and competencies of staff development specialists were articulated. However, many of the training projects and experimental activities were conducted on a project grant basis and were not connected into an overall plan for training teachers. The state adult education directors became critical of how the regional efforts channeled funds into

building new graduate programs in adult education. Others felt that the focus areas chosen by the regional centers were too narrow to benefit all of the states equally. Therefore, in 1975, the USDOE transferred the staff development responsibilities and funding over to the control of the states. Each state developed its own way to deal with the issues of designing a staff development system which was relevant to the various needs of diverse programs and functional for their geographic situation and population distribution (Leahy, 1986).

But even when staff development was done at the state level it was difficult to find a common base. Leahy refers to a comparative study done by Berlin in 1984 which noted that staff development programs found it difficult to implement innovations on a large scale because there is no common base or curriculum model for all of the programs. Therefore, the state-wide training often missed its mark. "Broad generalized approaches are taken, often leaving the adaptation, implementation and all related decisions in the hands of local program and individual teachers (Leahy, 1986, p.14)."

Shifting policies concerning who had to pick up responsibility for implementing staff development had a negative impact on the local programs' stability as well as on the state's efforts to maintain continuity. For example, the federal guidelines that accompanied the 310 monies limited the participation of those directly involved in adult basic education programs as well as the usefulness of state task forces which were supposed to establish priorities and identify needs. In the case of Pennsylvania, the staff development approach essentially went in a circle from 1970 - 1985. Services started at the state Division of Education, shifted to the colleges and universities, then to related

agencies, then back to the Division of Education. After brief experiments with Summer Institutes, Individualized Training Programs, program initiated workshops and other innovations, they returned to the Saturday workshop as the main model for staff development. Although some individual staff development events were effective in addressing short-term perceived needs, there was no long-term purposeful planning that included input from the local teachers and programs. This inconsistency has contributed greatly to the State's inability to tap its real potential (Leahy, 1986).

Criticism of the Situation

In 1988, the Southport Institute for Policy Analysis (Chisman, 1989) conducted a project examining the government's role in promoting adult literacy. They found that there were no institutional nor knowledge bases to support literacy programs to serve the twenty million-plus citizens in need of some form of adult education services. At the federal level, institutional responsibility has been divided between the departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services. At the state level, federal funds from these three agencies are channeled through education agencies, private industry councils and welfare departments. Adult literacy and basic skills training are not the primary concern of any of these agencies and receive a low level priority within their bureaucracies.

The knowledge base is similarly fragmented and of low priority. "There are no centers of excellence and few structured programs of investigation. There is no system for evaluating and disseminating the body of experience-based knowledge we have (Chisman, 1989, p. 6)." Furthermore, the few million dollars spent on adult literacy

research by government, industry, foundations and voluntary groups is minuscule compared to the hundreds of millions of dollars and legions of researchers focused on K-12 education research and dissemination. This lack of attention to forming a coherent knowledge base undermines any sort of foundation for promoting coherent staff development in adult literacy education. In between the cracks, some states, businesses, unions, volunteer groups and community organizations have developed innovative programs, but efforts to network and share information are limited.

> At the bottom of this fragmented heap of institutions is the person who must actually do the work: the basic skills instructor. There are practically no full-time adult basic skills teachers in the United States for the simple reasons that very few public or private programs operate full-time, pay a competitive wage, or provide benefits. Most teachers are part-time professionals or volunteers. Their primary training and career paths are outside this field.
>
> In these circumstances, a surprisingly large number of teachers appear to be committed to the field. But as practitioners, they are often isolated and neglected. They have few opportunities to improve their expertise, either by learning from their colleagues or by receiving in-service training that would keep them current with the state of the art.
>
> Operating with limited budgets, the managers of basic skills programs correctly perceive that every dollar spent on teacher training is a dollar unavailable for providing services. Because they are held accountable for the number of hours of instruction provided, or some other crude measure of service, they rarely invest their dollars in teacher training, despite the fact that most teachers say they very much need and want more help. (Chisman, 1989, p. 8).

The Jump Start report (Chisman, 1989) recommended legislative initiatives which included building a knowledge base and improving training opportunities. Specifically they proposed the establishment of a national center for adult literacy which

would have three major functions: research, technical assistance and training, and policy analysis. In addition to a national center, the Jump Start report also recommended that existing federal programs earmark funds for research, remove restrictions on teacher training investments, create matching funds for investments in training, and establish a literacy leader training fund.

Renewed Attention

The establishment of a National Center for Adult Literacy at the University of Pennsylvania in 1990 marked a major effort to institutionalize a linkage between policy, research and practice. The Center is co-funded by the Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services. It's three basic goals are "to enhance the knowledge base on adult literacy, to improve the quality of research and development in the field, and to ensure a strong, two-way relationship between research and practice" (NCAL, 1991). To achieve the first two goals, the Center works in collaboration with partner universities and private research agencies. To achieve the third goal - to promote a two-way relationship between research and practice through a "concept of client-centered, self-sustaining networks of practitioners, researchers and policymakers, and developers as well as business, industry, and labor leaders and the public" (NCAL, 1991), the Center has set up a newsletter, a publications service and a gopher server on the Internet to disseminate technical reports from NCAL sponsored research projects and other information it has generated at its invitation only conferences, workshops and roundtables.

NCAL is essentially a research organization devoted to improving the knowledge base of the field and is not involved in providing direct staff development resources to practitioners except through certain research projects focused on staff development issues that collaborate with practitioners. (See NCAL Brochure and issues of Connections). Although practitioners are invited to the various functions and included in the research projects, it is not clear how NCAL enacts its concept of client-centered, self-sustaining networks of practitioners, researchers and policy-makers.

The National Literacy Act of 1991 (H.R. 751-3) was the first legislation to actually address the need for staff development. Under this act, the National Institute for Literacy was initiated and given a number of duties, including "conduct basic and applied research and demonstrations on literacy, including . . . (viii) how to attract, train and retrain professional and volunteer teachers of literacy." The act also establishes State Literacy Resource Centers with funds provided to

> improve and promote the diffusion and adoption of state-of-the-art teaching methods, technologies and program evaluations. . . provide training and technical assistance to literacy instructors in reading instruction and in selecting and making the most effective use of state-of-the-art methodologies, instructional materials, and technologies. . . encourage and facilitate the training of full-time professional adult educators (National Literacy Act of 1991).

Despite delays in finding a permanent director, the National Institute for Literacy is now established and states have begun setting up or expanding their state resource centers.

The prevailing trend in the history of staff development initiatives is that new policy and funding resources set in motion a wave of do it yourself literacy programs followed by a sporadic catch-up effort to provide centrally-planned top-down staff

development workshops and conferences. In the midst of this constantly changing funding environment, states and local programs have more or less created their own approaches to the staff development problem. The next section summarizes the current situation.

Current State of Staff Development in the U. S.

From 1990-1993, Pelavin Associates with San Francisco State University and Adult Learning Resource Center conducted a 30 month study of ABE/ESL Instructor Training Approaches for the Office of Vocational and Adult Education. They reviewed the current literature on staff development and produced staff development profiles on every state. They also produced a series of Instructional Packets and disseminated them through a national Training Workshop.

Current Approaches

The Pelavin study (Tibbetts, et al. 1991) affirmed previous findings that staff development in adult education was a fundamental weakness. They stated that although Federal money had been available for approximately 15 years, staff development programs had only been documented sporadically through program reports, graduate student studies and self-promotional articles. Due to the fact that the field relies primarily on part-time teachers and volunteers, only 11 states have certification requirement that require special training for adult education. 25 states do not require any certification at all. Inservice training and staff development programs are the main alternatives to certification, but delivery of training is limited by lack of funding, lack of a research base, and lack of organized services.

According to the Pelavin study, there are currently four main types of adult education teacher training programs: 22 states have Four-Year Colleges or Universities that provide training, 21 states have state-supported training centers, 25 states have local agencies such as community colleges and community-based organizations and 5 states have professional organizations. Some states have more than one type of training provider. The most popular formats for delivering training to adult literacy educators is through single workshops and conferences. Table 2.2 shows responses from 50 states concerning the various forms of training available to instructors:

Table 2.2 Formats for Adult Literacy Instructor Training

Formats	states
Single Workshops	43
Conferences	31
Workshop Series	14
Peer Coaching	12
Coursework	12
Teleconference/Video	8
Mentoring	5

In addition to the formats reported in the state surveys, the Pelavin study also found in the literature that a number of teachers were using self-directed study, peer coaching and action research for their own personal staff development.

While single workshops and conferences are clearly the most popular approaches, there are a wide range of formats currently in use. Kutner (1992) lists the following:

1. Single workshops: one session on a single topic with no follow-up

2. Conferences: a day or two of workshops and plenary sessions on various topics

3. Workshop series: sequenced group of training session built on one topic

4. University coursework: weekly or monthly classes

5. Summer Institute: full day, or several days of training during the summer, sometimes followed by workshops during the year

6. Peer coaching: teachers helping other teachers

7. Action research: teachers as researchers conduct systematic inquiry with their students in their own classrooms

8. Self-directed learning: individuals decide what they want to learn about and figure out how to get that training. Self-directed learning is supported by teacher-sharing groups, study circles, mini-grants for research and development projects

In addition to conferences and workshops, Crocker (1987) also mentions newsletters and resource centers or libraries as delivery models for staff development. These two approaches provide an organizing function that brings some level of continuity to staff development efforts in that newsletters provide a medium for announcements and information exchange, while resource centers provide a tangible place to get information, guidance and resources. Reuys (1991) mentions many of the same activities listed above, and also includes some innovative formats such as meeting with students to get feedback and suggestions and organizing exchanges between programs. Finally, Crew, et al. (no date) identified seven non-traditional approaches:

1. self-directed activities: reflective journals, staying current with the literature, selecting a topic to study and presenting findings to others, etc.

2. media-based activities: electronic technology, computer assisted instruction, videos, T.V., audio cassettes, etc.

3. networking activities: interagency collaboration; sharing ideas and information; attendance at local, regional, state and national coalition and professional meetings, workshops and conferences.

4. creative workshops: brain storming, case studies, demonstrations, simulations, role-playing, games and other activities which go beyond the usual lectures and group discussions.

5. on-the-job experiences: special training assignments, peer coaching, staff rotations, experimentation with new methods and techniques, etc.

6. mentoring: an experienced person provides guidance, support and opportunities for learning, transition and advancement to another person

7. memos, newsletters, etc: sharing information within and between programs.

Exemplary Approaches

The range of staff development approaches indicates that there are numerous creative solutions to filling the need for staff development in adult literacy. However, it is not clear how many approaches are actually being used. Most research on staff development focuses on large scale centralized efforts. The in-depth study which Pelavin (Sherman, et al. 1991) did of nine exemplary staff development programs show that some programs used a much wider variety of approaches than others. Table 2.3, on the following page summarizes the range of formats which they used.

Table 2.3 Formats Used for Staff Development in Exemplary Programs

Program and Type	Formats used for Staff Development
Adult Basic Literacy Educators Network Seattle Central Community College - statewide, WA	Two-day Summer Institute Regional Workshops Local programs - follow-up and action plans
Adult Community Educ. Network - Delaware Technical and Community College - statewide	Local Inservice Workshops Summer Courses at ACE and University of Delaware Conferences with Delaware Association of Adult and Continuing Education
ESL Teacher Training Institute, Association of California School Administrators, statewide	Selection & Training of Trainers (four-series workshop) Regional Workshops Contract Training, District and In-House Conferences and Out-of-State Training
Literacy Training Network University of St. Thomas, statewide, Minnesota	Training the Trainers (on-going process of quarterly meetings for a total of 10-13 days) Summer Intensive Training - 3-1/2 day workshop Fall and Spring Regional Workshops Local Training
Dade County Adult Assessment System Dade County Public Schools - local, Florida	Local Centers request training on at topic for a specified amount of time, usually 1 or 2 hours 10 Hour Training Series
Project Read, San Francisco Public Library - local, California	Pre-service training for volunteer tutors (1-1/2 hour orientation and four 2-1/2 hour sessions) Follow-up support
City University of New York - local, New York	Ongoing Demonstration Classes open for observation; Interaction with staff development specialist On-site Technical Assistance Graduate Courses Curriculum Development Projects Formal and Informal Classroom Observations Conferences on special topics Monthly Staff Meetings Distinguished Speakers Series City-wide, state and national conferences

continued, next page

Table 2.3 continued

Program and Type	Formats used for Staff Development
New Jersey Bureau of Program Development, Evaluation and Training - statewide	Annual Orientation for all new teachers Directors Round Table (yearly meeting) Subject-Specific Regional Training Sharing Sessions (one day) Summer Institute (3 day annual event, specialized tracks Conference - annual 2 day On-Site Training - 1/2 day at request of local program
System for Adult Basic Education Support, World Education - statewide with Regional Centers, MASS	Staff Development Facilitator Training (goal to provide a skilled staff dev. facilitator in every program) Orientation for New Staff (15 hour course - regional) Workshops - on site or regionally, some statewide Mini-Courses - series of 4 to 8 workshops Study Circles - topic and structure decided by group Teacher-Researcher Projects Mini-Grants - for research & local materials production

It is important to note for the purposes of this dissertation study, that SABES in Massachusetts is among those that list the most alternative formats. In the midst of the conflicting policies and general neglect of staff development described in the previous section, the Bureau of Adult Education in Massachusetts took the initiative to make their own priorities. They requested and got permission from the federal government in 1989 to put all of their special projects and staff development money into creating one complete staff development system. Over the last five years, the System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES) has been developing a network of resources and strategies based on practitioner input and participation. This system will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, since it provides an alternative approach to staff development as well as a supportive context for the development of the study circle support group which is the object of this dissertation.

New Initiatives

Since the Pelavin survey of the situation of staff development across the United States, there have been new changes. In August 1993, the Department of Education put out a request for proposals for State Literacy Resource Centers, they described the need for "systematic, continuous, well-integrated staff development as a primary means for program improvement" and pointed out that most states have periodic workshops, conferences and training courses rather than a "true staff development system" (National Institute for Literacy, 1993).

Clearly, recent policy changes and newly available funding is beginning to change the state of staff development in adult literacy education. The state literacy resource centers have begun to coordinate their resources and expand their efforts during 1994 with a wide variety of approaches. Based on a selection of brochures, efforts to create staff development systems include graduate credit institutes, workshops and action research topics in Tennessee; on-line communications and electronic information exchange in Texas; and an 18-semester-hour planned program in Michigan.

The state of staff development in adult literacy is moving into a new phase with more resources being made available and more attention paid to how staff development should be organized and implemented. However, there is still a growing need for more evaluation, documentation and information sharing about effective strategies.

Content of Staff Development and Need for a Knowledge Base

In addition to looking at the policies and structures for delivering staff development, it is also informative to examine the content of staff development activities

and how that content is determined. In their survey of staff development activities in all of the states, Pelavin Associates (Tibbetts, et al. 1991) documented the most common content areas reported by the states. Most states covered more than one category. Table 2.4 summarizes their findings.

Table 2.4 Staff Development Content Areas Reported by States

Frequency of Content Areas for Staff Development	Number of states	percent of states
curriculum and strategy selection	35	69
computers/technology in the classroom	23	45
general management (PR, finances, etc.)	23	45
learning disabled adults	21	41
workplace literacy	21	41
math	19	37
peer observation and coaching	16	31
managing volunteers	14	27
adult learners	13	25
Laubach methods	12	24
family literacy	11	22
cultural awareness	11	22
managing stress/counseling techniques	11	22
student assessment	11	22
critical thinking	11	22
learning styles	10	20
whole language experience	10	20
mentoring	5	10

Overall, the content of training varies greatly from state to state, and few states do needs assessment on training content in a systematic manner. In most states, there are at least two categories of content: 1) training in the subject matter that will be taught to students and 2) training in pedagogical issues such as understanding adult learning, cultural differences, teaching methods. Recently topics such as problem solving, higher order thinking skills and interpersonal relations have gained popularity (Tibbetts, et al. 1991).

Based on findings and recommendations from their nationwide study, Pelavin (1993) developed eight instructional packets for training adult educators on topics which their survey indicated were of greatest importance. The topics for the packets were

The Adult Learner	Planning for Instruction
Communicative ESL Teaching	Whole Language Approach
Monitoring Student Progress	Working with Volunteers
Team Learning	Mathematics: Strategic Problem Solving

Other organizations at national, state and regional level have taken other approaches for determining the content of staff development programs. The Division of Adult Basic and Literacy Education Programs in Pennsylvania implemented a special project to develop a Professional Development Guide for Adult Literacy Practitioners (Royce, 1991). This project took the approach of providing professional development resources rather than organizing staff development activities. As explained in the ABLE Sampler, "Staff development is training you provide for others; professional development is learning you acquire for yourself." (Royce, 1991, p. 1) The ABLE Sampler is

designed with the realities of the field of adult education in mind, acknowledging that the question of who trains the trainer has been a problem since 1941.

> While the number of clients served by adult literacy councils and basic skills programs has topped the one million mark, only a handful of adult education graduate programs provide a specialization in adult literacy and fewer still offer the flexibility of scheduling essential to practitioners who cannot afford to take off a few years to pursue a degree. So leaders in the field of adult literacy continue to be largely responsible for their own learning (Royce, 1991, p.1).

To make it easier for literacy professionals to manage their own learning, the people who assembled the ABLE Sampler organized a national task force to assemble a selection of exemplary resources. The sampler guide is divided into nine chapters with an introduction by a leading authority, a core collection of reviews and an annotated listing of resources. The content of the chapters cover the following topics:

- Administration and Management
- Diverse Populations
- History, Philosophy and Politics
- Social Context
- Adult Literacy Resources
- Adults as Learners
- Evaluation
- Instructional Strategies
- Workplace Literacy

The appendix to the sampler guide includes an extensive list of journals, newsletters and publishers.

Practitioner Participation in Choosing Content

Many staff development programs feel it is important to draw upon both academic and practical knowledge, but leave the selection of content up to the practitioners and design the staff development to include time for sharing experience and talking about how to put theory into practice. Such approaches incorporate principles of adult learning theory into their practice by practicing what they preach in terms

remembering that adults are more problem-centered than subject-centered in learning (Whiting, et al. 1988). For example, it makes more sense in designing staff development activities to address the problems practitioners are facing in the classroom in dealing with students ranging from age 18 to 69, than to provide them with a formal discussion of the theories on adult learning. The alternative formats for staff development such as study circles, sharing groups, teacher research, etc. are more conducive to providing practitioners with a chance to learn theory through problem-solving.

For example, City University of New York (Brown, et al. 1987) has a teacher-centered staff development curriculum that sets up a structure to handle emerging content interests. After a standardized three hour instructional orientation, teachers meet in one hour monthly meetings at convenient times. The discussions focus on classroom topics identified by the teachers. One on one meetings scheduled by individuals and other activities such as visits, videos and support materials provide a structure of resources that respond to teacher need. The Association of Community Based Educators (ACBE, 1993) also takes the approach of recommending to its member organizations to set up a structure and a process for staff development rather than stipulating specific practices or topics that must be taught. Lytle, et al., propose that staff development should be

> a program improvement strategy rather than a teacher improvement strategy, and its nature and content are determined by research on how programs improve rather than by research on training teachers to implement a set of effective teaching practices. From this perspective, staff refers to the core of professionals who work together in a program site; development assumes people with diverse expertise moving forward

> together by "linking activities and events in coherent ways" and working toward a particular end (1992b, p. 2).

This alternative view of the nature and content of staff development moves away from the conception that staff development should focus on predetermined skills and knowledge as content and followed by strategies to help practitioners adopt new practices, beliefs and understanding. In the inquiry-based approach proposed by Lytle's team, staff development programs should start with teachers reflecting on their own work so that through research and collaborative dialogue, they can identify their own questions and areas of interest, and devise and implement their own strategies and practices to reshape the learning environment of their programs.

The different approaches to selecting content for staff development basically correlate to the two prevailing models of adult literacy education. The functional model or deficit approach assumes that learners are lacking in basic knowledge and skills which can be provided by literacy programs. The corresponding staff development models do needs assessments to identify the content and skills which teachers need and provide workshops to address those needs. The empowerment models assume that literacy learners come with knowledge and experience that should be part of their literacy learning process. The corresponding staff development model assumes practitioners have knowledge and experience and invites them to identify their own content and to participate in designing their own staff development materials and experiences and in teaching each other.

Although I know of no formal studies, evidence from discussions with staff development personnel and regional resource center directors at SABES in Massachusetts indicates clearly that different programs and their personnel prefer different types of staff development opportunities. The variety of staff development alternatives which SABES Regional Centers offer in response to practitioner requests indicates a sensitivity to the differing needs of programs and their personnel.

Finally, the content of staff development for community-based adult education cannot be limited to teaching and classroom issues, because the success of the program is dependent on a much wider range of skills among the various practitioners on the staff. Over the course of their career, adult education practitioners may need to know how to train and supervise volunteers, write funding proposals, engage in advocacy for funding and legislation for the survival of their program, counsel learners on employment, family and other life decisions, collaborate with a range of community service agencies, and/or take on the directorship and development of the program to name just a few of the things they encounter in addition to teaching adult learners to read and write. Since staff development is generally offered as inservice rather than preservice training, it has the advantage of being able to include the current experience of the participants as material for discussion and inquiry.

Defining a Knowledge Base for Adult Literacy

Behind the new push to identify relevant content for staff development programs, there is also discussion about the need for a clear knowledge base that would mark adult literacy education as a profession. The unspoken assumption, about where the

knowledge base comes from, is influenced by the formal K-12 system where university-based researchers hold the position of knowledge creators. But adult literacy education has been largely ignored by the university researchers resulting in a situation where adult literacy practitioners, who could not rely on either policy-makers or researchers for guidance and support, have created their own knowledge base.

While some, such as Ryan (no date) feel that what passed for research and development in adult literacy was usually "the artisanal fabrication of methods and approaches by committed practitioners, many of whom lacked specialized training in relevant disciplines," the necessity of practitioners participating in the development of their own knowledge base has laid a foundation for their continued participation in theoretical research as well as the practical matters of staff development and skill training.

However, past participation in creating their own practical knowledge base does not mean that practitioners will continue to develop their own theory and practice in isolation from the university-based research community. The growing awareness of the need for adult literacy education, criticism of general practice, increased funding and the recent realization that staff development is important have rallied researchers from related disciplines to the cause. According to Ryan, there is now a sizeable body of research literature from many disciplines and practice in countless settings which is capable of illuminating and guiding the preparation of practitioners who are implementing programs. He feels that this growing body of research findings, project documents and evaluations needs to be put to work keeping researchers abreast of

current developments in the field, alerting policy makers to the cause and effect connections between policy decisions and their consequences, and providing practitioners with information from research and experimental programs as well as instructional methods and materials based on up-to-date, tested knowledge.

Despite the recent increase in the knowledge base of adult literacy, it is still relatively small compared to the more general field of reading education. Shanahan, et al. (1994) surveyed the ERIC database and found that only 1,210 research studies and 3,056 other documents on adult literacy have been generated since 1966, compared with more than 100,000 studies and documents generated for reading education in the formal system during the same time period. In 1989, the International Conference on Education recommended that universities and other institutions of higher education should be encouraged to contribute to the development of other forms of education, particularly to training and research activities to reduce illiteracy and to function as centers for continuing individualized and distance education (Tohme, 1990).

Up to this point in time, adult literacy has had a second rate status in academia according to Stromquist (1991). In her analysis, academicians and practitioners have very different research interests. Academics tend to focus on conceptualizing, defining and measuring literacy in precise ways while practitioners are more interested in solving problems of implementation. While anthropologists and sociologists look at cultural contexts and explore the complex role and relevance of literacy, practitioners assume the need for literacy and look for effective strategies for implementing culturally appropriate literacy programs.

Practitioners have questions about selection and training of instructors, about the development of culturally sensitive materials and teaching methods, and about how to better understand the populations they serve. They also deal with the political issues of funding, power, marginalization from society, local development and human rights. While many academics are making contributions in defining literacy and in understanding its functions and applications, only a few are working to help practitioners deal with either day-to-day activities or with the larger political issues. However, it might be possible for the two groups to act more complementarily.

> The academicians' emphasis on literacy as a complex act of cognition could illuminate the understanding of learners in literacy programs and thus influence the training of literacy teachers and the pedagogical success of literacy programs. Theories of human learning and cognition do stand to make contributions. The practitioners' concern with literacy as a necessary step in the quest for individuals to understand the political and technological nature of the contemporary world should help to establish a clear link between literacy and politics, which in turn would illuminate why the constraints of literacy so often surpass its promise (Stromquist, 1991, p. 24).

In UNESCO's Literacy Lessons, published for the 1990 International Literacy Year, Tohme outlines several ways that the university should be involved in the worldwide effort to reduce illiteracy. He recommends that research should cover four fields:

> * the effects of literacy programs on the social environment of illiterate adults and determination of the necessary educational needs for the campaign against illiteracy to be successful;
>
> * preparation and experimentation of teaching aids and materials (books, brochures, tables, etc.), of teaching methods, evaluation, computer-assisted teaching, distance education, etc.;

> * recommendations for a reorganization of the education system as a whole, especially with regard to the education of illiterates, including consideration of its qualities and organization, and the training and improvement of different types of personnel;
>
> * preparation of situation studies and basic socio-economic and cultural needs. (1990, p. 8-9)

Tohme's article never pushes the potential of these recommendations beyond the traditional university roles of researching, recommending, training and disseminating. He seems to assume that existing faculty in the field of education can be ready and willing to step in and offer solutions for a new cause. However, university-based researchers and practitioners have varying interpretations regarding how universities should become involved in adult literacy education.

Lytle, et al. (1992) point out that although there is a concern for the lack of university involvement in educating adult literacy professionals, there are also serious questions about appropriate university curriculum and the qualifications of those who would design and teach the courses. Furthermore, given the current state of adult literacy as a professional field combined with current state policies which require little or no certification requirements for adult literacy instructors or administrators, there are not enough incentives for practitioners to seek university-level training, or for universities to seriously consider setting up programs.

The new involvement of university-based researchers and policy makers presents a situation where the relationship between practitioners and researchers needs to be addressed. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1992) advocate that practitioners should be participating in the creation of knowledge in their field and argue that if new knowledge

is only constructed by university-based researchers, then the teachers are only expected to acquire the skills of effective teaching and apply them to their practice. In the limited technical view where university researchers produce the theories for the field, staff development is seen as a vehicle for transmitting skills to teachers rather than as a process for collaborative inquiry and the co-generation of a knowledge base. This issue will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. But first, the next section looks at some of the current research on staff development approaches and the need for a support system that connects the content of staff development to the realities of program development.

Research on Effective Staff Development

Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1990) identified five models for providing staff development to teachers. 1) The individually guided model, where teachers take responsibility for their own learning, 2) the observation/assessment model, where teachers are given feedback on their performance, 3) the development/improvement process model, where teachers learn by solving problems and developing curriculum, 4) the training model, where teachers are taught new skills and knowledge, and 5) the inquiry model, where teachers examine their own practice through reflection and/or collecting and interpreting data. They indicate that only the training model has received sufficient attention in the research and that there is a great need for research on the effectiveness of the other models.

In the field of adult literacy, it would be particularly interesting to examine the individually guided model and the development/improvement model. Considering the

limited opportunities for staff development and the fact that most teachers learn on the job, it would be useful to collect information on what adult literacy practitioners have been doing for themselves and their programs over the last few decades. It would also be interesting to examine the growing evidence that practitioners are formalizing their personal inquiry process and publishing articles in journals, newsletters, project reports, handbooks and other publications. Some of this will be discussed in the next chapter.

Elements of Effective Staff Development

Although very little evaluation has been done on the effectiveness of the various methods and models used in adult education, there is a growing assumption by many that single workshops and conferences, though popular, are not particularly effective. The Pelavin study generated several lists of criteria for effective staff development. Tibbetts, et al. (1991) looked at the K-12 System to derive some indication of what constituted meaningful staff development and concluded that effective staff development programs

--must be based on systematically identified needs
--involve teachers and volunteer instructors in planning and decision-making
--maintain a positive climate for teacher and volunteer growth and change
--show evidence of systematic decision-making
--demonstrate consistent underlying assumptions
--reflect continuity and follow-up
--include ongoing and systematic evaluation procedures.

Sherman, et al. (1991) did an in-depth analysis of the nine exemplary programs in the Pelavin study described above and developed lists for two dimensions of effective staff development practices: delivery of training services and content.

Elements Associated with effective delivery of staff development:

--Experienced and dedicated training administrator and staff: trainers had first-hand experience as practitioners, were sensitive to needs and possessed expertise in the content area

--Decentralized training services: statewide efforts are criticized as too general, focus was made on regional and local needs

--Systematic follow-up of training: follow-up left to local programs with feedback to the trainers, multiple session workshops allowed time for practice and application and feedback, on-site observations reinforced work

--Evaluation of procedures: evaluation forms and methods were used to improve future staff development activities

Elements associated with the content of effective staff development:

--Training is responsive to the needs of teachers and volunteers: needs were assessed through surveys, workshop evaluations, staff recommendations and informal needs assessment such as phone calls and visits

--Participants are involved in the learning process: practice oriented approaches, learner-centered strategies, peer coaching, teacher as researcher and study circles provide opportunities for quality involvement

--Appropriate instruction is modeled: videos, demonstrations, modeling by the training, peer coaching and role playing are helpful

--Learning is placed within a theoretical framework: research literature is incorporated into the content and techniques being taught.

--Training topics are appropriate for teachers and volunteers: movement toward emphasizing meaning and utility rather than simple mechanics in reading, writing and mathematics; problem posing, problem solving and collaborative approaches are used.

Kutner (1992) divides the key elements for effective staff development differently. He puts them into three broad categories: 1) developing ownership in training through needs assessment, involving practitioners in planning, creating a

professional environment by rewarding teachers with money or release time to recognize their achievements and respect them as professionals, and actively involving teachers in their own learning through peer coaching, self-directed learning and teacher research; 2) designing instruction that includes theory, demonstrations, practice and feedback, application, follow-up and evaluation; and 3) addressing the real concerns of teachers and volunteers.

Such lists delineating quality criteria seem to be quite common in the research on staff development. In 1987, the National Adult Basic Education Staff Development Consortium conducted a study of the Principles and Techniques for Effective ABE Staff Development. Through surveys and dialogue sessions at a AAACE conference, they identified 70 principles and 39 techniques which were ranked in order of importance. The principles were divided into three categories: general principles, principles for planning staff development and principles for implementing staff development. The following list includes a selection of the principles and techniques from the lists which were most highly rated in the survey.

General Principles of Staff Development:

1. A human climate of openness, acceptance and trust must be established.
2. A positive climate includes comfortable physical environment and the building of a "spirit" among staff.
3. Participants are treated as professionals and mature adults who want to continue to expand their skills and competence.
4. The experience base of adults is taken into account when planning inservice and activities are planned to relate to each individuals conceptual framework and experience.
5. Participants choose to become involved.
6. Activities that are linked to a professional development plan are better than one-shot approaches on a variety of topics.

7. Staff development is an on-going process that encourages growth for continuing staff and integration into the program for new staff.
8. Focus is on goals that are meaningful and attainable.
9. Evaluation is an integral component
10. Evaluation provides continuous feedback on staff development effectiveness and influences future planning.

Principles for Planning Staff Development:

1. An early step is an assessment of teacher needs in relation to student needs.
2. Activities are based on a continuous assessment of participants' needs.
3. Perceived training needs of teachers and needs of program are assessed.
4. Activities that view the participants as resources are more responsive to participants needs.
5. Inservice programs accommodate both short and long range staff needs.

Principles for Staff Development Implementation:

1. Participants know what will be expected of them, what they will be able to do after the experience and how they will be evaluated.
2. Opportunities are provided for small group discussions on the application of new practices and sharing of ideas and concerns about effective instruction during the training sessions.
3. Teachers have an opportunity to meet and share ideas with colleagues to provide support and facilitate change.
4. New procedures are presented clearly and explicitly by a person perceived as credible by the group in training.
5. Staff development is spaced over intervals in which to plan and try out new approaches and return to evaluate their success and problems. "One-shot" schedules of an hour, day or a week are likely to be less effective.
6. Alternative structures for delivery are available.
7. Participants' concerns are listened to and appropriate adjustments are made.
8. The presenter is able to approach the subject from the participants' view.

ABE Staff Development Techniques:

1. Plan more time for practices that require complex thinking skills, provide more practice and consider activities that develop conceptual flexibility.
2. Nonjudgmental feedback and reciprocity, the practice of coaching, support and technical assistance are more valuable when people are trying out new methods than evaluation.
3. Reinforce the perception of adult educators as "facilitators" rather than "teachers."

4. Closely relate the activities of curriculum development, improvement of instruction , and inservice education.
5. A competent staff developer:
   --is knowledgeable about the topic
   --has clear objectives in mind
   --is well organized
   --keeps on schedule
   --explains procedures and gives directions for all activities
   --adheres to the topic
   --uses audio-visual materials skillfully
   --allows time for questions
   --provides opportunity for practice
   --uses active involvement techniques
   --avoids straight lecture method
   --maintains balance between group participation and presentation of information
   --demonstrates ideas and strategies with classroom examples
   --demonstrates materials that have immediate use in classroom

The most striking thing about the lists, aside from the fact that it is even more mind-numbing to read the unabridged version, is that everything is so obvious to anyone who has ever designed or participated in a staff development activity for adult literacy practitioners. Of course we want a positive climate, of course we want it to be relevant, of course we want it to be connected to program and student needs.

The lists can be used as checklists or guidelines in planning or evaluating staff development models, but they are long and cumbersome and so basic that we forget to analyze the implications of what is actually involved in implementing each item on the list. Including teachers in the planning or providing sufficient opportunity for practice require extensive logistical preparation and much longer timelines than current staff development resources can accommodate. The result is that much staff development turns out to be a simulation of the principles rather than a serious implementation.

Influence of Theoretical Perspectives

In their study of ABE/ESL Instructor Training Approaches, Tibbetts, et. al. (1991) identified five theoretical perspectives on adult learning which were influencing practice in the United States. 1) The mainstream theories of adult learning were based on developmental and educational psychology. The work of Malcolm Knowles (1984, 1980) is probably the most widely quoted. 2) Theories influenced by Freire's (1973, 1970) work have also emerged and argue for basing literacy education on the socio-economic context of the learners and promoting social change. 3) Feminist social scientists such as Gilligan (1982) and Belenky, et. al. (1986) have had a recent impact on programs working with women. 4) Cognitive science and cognitive psychology are offering new areas of theoretical promise through the work of Gardner (1987) and Scribner (1986). 5) And finally, sociolinguistics and second language acquisition theories are especially important in ESL literacy (Krashen & Terrel, 1983; Cook, 1982).

The mainstream staff development principles and trends are largely influenced by theories coming from developmental psychology, particularly Malcolm Knowles' theories of adult learning. Practitioner input through needs assessment is valued along with participation as role models and peer teachers, participatory techniques and small group discussions are utilized, and the process of learning a new skill through practice, feedback and coaching is modeled. However, these models do not adequately put into practice such basic tenets of adult learning theory as "adults prefer problem-solving approaches to topic centered approaches" due to lack of time and resources and a

philosophy of staff development that assumes a deficit rather than an empowerment model.

The deficit model is also evident in studies which design the process for delivering staff development. In Butler's (1989) review of staff development research on effective staff development, she cited three researchers who had studied staff development and identified components or steps of effective staff development programs.

Joyce & Showers (1980)

a. Presentation of theory or description of the new skill or strategy
b. Modeling or demonstration of skills or strategic models
c. Practice in simulated and actual settings
d. Structured and open-ended feedback to provide information about performance in the practice
e. Coaching for application, the follow-up work to help with the at-home implementation of the new skill and/or knowledge

Stallings, Needels & Stayrook (1978)

a. Pre-test: the diagnosis of current level of expertise vis-a-vis the new knowledge/skill
b. Inform and discuss: new material is presented and time is made available for participant discussion
c. Guided practice and feedback: the application in a simulated setting with direct comment in response to the practice
d. Post-test: the rechecking of participant level of knowledge/skill to ascertain whether learning has taken place

Sparks (1983)

a. Diagnosing and prescribing: the pre-program assessment of participants' needs and ways to meet them
b. Giving information and demonstrating its application
c. Discussing application
d. Practicing and giving feedback
e. Coaching

It is worth noting that the models with prescriptive terms such as "pre and post-tests", "diagnosis and prescription" don't appear to have had as much influence with ABE staff developers who are choosing strategies like "needs assessment" and "input from participants" which are more in keeping with accepted principles of adult learning theory.

On the other hand, although Joyce and Showers compiled their components in 1980, they seem to have had an on-going influence in ABE circles. Along with the extensive lists of principles they compiled, the National ABE Staff Development Consortium also included in the appendix of their report a chart delineating Components of Effective Inservice Training. Although the reference says it was adapted from the Staff Development Leadership Teams' Training Manual, Ohio Department of Education, 1983, the components clearly came from Joyce and Showers: Theory, Modeling or Demonstration, Practice, Feedback, and Coaching.

Furthermore, Pelavin Associates (Kutner, 1992) was influenced by this model in developing eight instructional packets for ABE teachers and volunteers as part of Phase II of their study for the Office of Vocation and Adult Education.

> Each instructional packet is designed to be delivered in two distinct, but sequenced, training sessions, approximately one month apart. This approach modelled on research findings on effective staff development, enables training participants to try out techniques learned during the first session in their own instructional settings, report back on their experiences, and receive feedback from the trainer and other participants during the second session (Pelavin, 1993).

Although these models include participatory techniques in their design, they are not grounded in the timing, experience and daily practice of adult literacy. They can provide

a certain amount of information about new theory and skills, but they do not provide support for the kind of staff development that builds programs and practice over time.

Need for a Support System

No matter how helpful the lists of principles and components of effective staff development may be for planning a training, conference, or workshop session, or even how wonderful the teacher inquiry projects may be, the major component lacking from all the research is an awareness of a system which serves as a meaningful context and provides continuity and coordination. Smith (1994) pointed out that staff development activities generally happen in an unconnected and haphazard way at both the local and central level in most states. She used a set of key characteristics involved in planning and implementing staff development activities to analyze the state profiles from the Pelavin study and created the chart shown on the next page in Table 2.5 to critique and compare the efforts of both local and centralized approaches to organizing staff development activities.

Table 2.5 Characteristics of Current Statewide Staff Development
source: Smith, (1994)

CHARACTERISTICS OF ACTIVITIES/TYPE OF STRUCTURE	INFORMAL, LOCAL ACTIVITIES	FORMAL, CENTRALIZED ACTIVITIES
Needs Assessment	Non-existent or assumed	Needs defined by center according to competencies, standard curriculum or yearly mail survey
Timing of SD Activities	Haphazard, when local need or funding allows	Centrally-determined usually annual events
Types of SD Activities	usually short-term, informal and unsystematic: sharing sessions, ad hoc presentations	Usually short term formal activities: conferences, workshops, institutes
Content of SD Activities	Determined by individual practitioner's expressed need when it arises, or by program requirements	Determined centrally based on competencies, standard curriculum, or annual survey
Location of SD Activities	Local, in program	Usually central
Funding of SD Activities	Non-existent or minimal	Centrally-allocated
Delivery System	Led by whoever is willing, possibly at no cost	Led by experts
Connection to Program Development	Usually not connected; if connected, at program level	Usually not connected; if connected, center makes connections based on statewide needs or direction of ABE field as determined by center
Recognition System	Program-determined or non-existent	State system which center monitors and confers
Evaluation of SD Activities	Non-existent or informal feedback after training or sharing session	Evaluation questionnaires at end of conference or workshop
Follow-up to SD Activities	Informal, happens haphazardly	Usually non-existent

Although new legislation, renewed interest in literacy and funding for state literacy resource centers hold the promise for a more integrated and developed field of adult basic education and literacy, researchers are still cognizant of the many barriers to promoting effective staff development in such a marginally established field. Lytle, Belzer and Reumann (1992) identified a number of barriers to inquiry-centered staff development. Probably the most important factor is the working lifestyle of the adult literacy practitioner. The majority of teachers and program directors are over-worked, not to mention underpaid and often working more than one job to make ends meet. Their lifestyle does not make it easy to find time for staff development activities.

Secondly, there are structural and programmatic barriers. There are multiple demands on people's time and attention, limited resources to pay for preparation time let alone staff development time. The variable schedule of classes at all hours of the day make it difficult to find common times to meet with other teachers in the same program, let alone meet with teachers from other programs. Finally, there is competition between programs for students, tutors and funds compounded by differing beliefs about how to teach adults that makes it difficult to organize staff development that meets the needs and interests of any given group of practitioners.

Crew, et al. (no date), identified eleven barriers to effective staff development.

1. part-time nature of staffing
2. low compensation and no career path resulting in few incentives
3. trainers are often poorly trained themselves
4. lack of quality standards for the practice of adult literacy education
5. many instructors are also full-time K-12 teachers who don't differentiate between teaching children and adults
6. poor planning that doesn't include input from participants misses the mark

7. lack of commitment from the system - low budgets and few resources
8. limited networking opportunities
9. lack of communication between members of the educational system
10. pressure to attend or criticism of input
11. lack of training based on sound research and evaluation.

The Pelavin study (Tibbetts, 1991) came up with a similar list of barriers to implementing staff development. They also included the part-time nature of the field, the lack of funding, and the lack of a research base as barriers to investment in staff development. Associated with these was the high turn-over rate of teachers which made investment in staff development less productive. Another issue they identified was timing. Practitioners work scheduled conflicted with available times for staff development activities. Finally, they noted that lack of certification requirements provided no outside motivation which staff development mandatory.

It is very important to take the systemic barriers into consideration when we try to envision effective staff development models. Staff development is circumscribed and defined by the organizations and systems where people work. Staff development is inseparable from program development and professional development within a field of expertise. Staff development is not merely helping individuals do their job well, it is

> enabling them to maximize their career potential as contributors to the organization. Staff development is growth oriented and is characterized as a long-term investment in an individual. It includes the personal and professional development of the individual within the structure of the organization. (Crew, et al., no date, p. 3)

In doing staff development in adult literacy, university-based teacher trainers and researchers have to realize the logistical constraints which part-time, isolated adult educators face in getting access to staff development. One way that staff developers at

City University of New York (CUNY) addressed this problem was to base their staff development plan on the following five assumptions:

1. Just as our students should take part in deciding what happens in their classes, teachers should take part in determining what happens in staff development.
2. Since many part-time teachers cannot attend workshops or conferences held at central locations, staff development must come to them, at their worksites.
3. Staff development is not a one or two-session activity. "Development" takes time, and a number of meetings should take place.
4. Teachers should be paid for the time they spend on staff development.
5. Teachers learn more from one another, in non-threatening situations, than they learn from other sources (Brown, 1987, p. 1).

These assumptions are also reflected in the experience of other university programs. The Temple University Staff Development Project in Pennsylvania found that workshops were more successful when they collaborated with practitioners in designing workshops to fit specific needs. They also found that providing a means for practitioner to learn from each other was a powerful staff development strategy. In an Individualized Training Program created to provide a means for adult literacy program practitioners to participate in a guided, self-directed graduate level staff development activities, one vital aspect of the program's success was that experienced individuals and effective programs were identified to serve as consultants and models for those working on their self-guided study (Leahy, 1986).

Mezirow and Yakowicz (1990) developed a distance education approach to staff development to provide resources and linkages for isolated practitioners. Their system was based on an action research model that engaged teachers in testing exemplary new

practices in their classrooms and participating in analysis, feedback and discussion through the mail, phone, fax or local groups.

Purposes for Staff Development

Gall and Renchler (1985) identified four purposes for staff development: 1) personal professional development, 2) credentialling, 3) induction for new hires, and 4) school (program) improvement. They felt that staff development tied to school improvement was the most effective. In thinking about the implication of these purposes for staff development in adult literacy education, some interesting issues emerge.

1. Personal professional development has probably been the most prevalent purpose, since there has been little institutional staff development available for adult educators. Most practitioners who have sought out learning experiences have done so on their own, motivated by commitment to their learners and a desire to improve their own practice. The present evolution of adult literacy into a professional field, however slow the process may be, is the result of practitioners in the field seeking their own professional development and networking together to create a viable professional field.

2. Credentialling is a very controversial issue in adult education. As mentioned above, very few states require any type of certification. Furthermore, many practitioners feel that it would be absurd to require certification or degrees for part-time jobs that have no career path and are funded by temporary grants. However, the renewed interest in staff development and professionalizing the field could indicate that more states will be requiring certification in the near future. The current education reform in Massachusetts

already affects teachers in Local Education Associations and prisons who are required to hold some sort of K-12 certificate.

3. Induction, or orientation, for new hires is either nonexistent or continually necessary to keep up with the fast staff turnover rate that some program experience. In a field with excessive turnover and part-time temporary employment, a program orientation barely counts as staff development in the broader sense of the term.

4. The concept of staff development for program improvement has potential. By definition, staff development means development of personal skill within the context of an organization. However, the method of short-term funding currently used to support most programs in the field of adult literacy education presents multiple problems for staff development. First of all most funding sources do not provide extra resources for staff development and program success is evaluated in terms of number of clients served rather than quality of program improvement efforts. Most community-based programs are funded from multiple sources, each of which require a certain type of expertise related to some aspect of literacy education but no resources to train existing staff. Programs often hire people with special skills for the duration of a particular funded program and let the person go when the project ends unless another funding source or special project is found. Many practitioners learn on the job and develop certain areas of expertise as they move from participation in special projects at various literacy programs.

Despite the popularity of the "theory, demonstration, practice, feedback and coaching" models, there are some unexamined assumptions that need to be identified and discussed. These assumptions include the following: 1) the assumption that there is

someone who knows and who can guide the staff development process; 2) the assumption that staff development is a linear process comprised of discrete activities and "packagable content areas that can be practiced, reviewed and coached in specified segments and sequences of time; and 3) the assumption that there is a functioning system and/or organization which provides a context and purpose for staff development. These assumptions will be examined in the following chapter along with a discussion of the alternative approaches to staff development that are emerging from current research and practice.

CHAPTER III

EMERGING ALTERNATIVES FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT

This chapter explores the emerging alternatives for staff development which take seriously the need to have practitioners participating fully in the development of theory and practice in the field. It is divided into three sections corresponding to questions about some underlying assumptions for staff development in adult literacy. 1) How can practitioners participate in guiding staff development and creating a knowledge base for the field? 2) How can a non-linear staff development process be designed to support practitioners working in the complex social context of literacy education? 3) Is it possible to create functioning systems and/or organizations to provide a context, continuity and purpose for staff development? In each of these sections, I will discuss relevant theories, examples from practice and a specific case that demonstrates the importance and viability of these emerging alternatives for staff development.

How can practitioners participate in guiding staff development and creating a knowledge base for the field?

The answer to this question is based on the assumption that the empowerment theories of adult education, where curriculum is based on the prior experience and knowledge of the learner, should be also applied in staff development strategies. In the case of staff development, the learner is a practitioner who is located in a very interesting place in relation to the intellectuals and university-based researchers, who are writing theories and descriptions of the field of adult literacy education, and the literacy students who are learning how to manage the functions and uses of literacy in their daily lives.

This section regards practitioners as knowers who have much to contribute to staff development and the knowledge base of the field as a result of their joint learning relationships with intellectuals/university-based practitioners and with literacy students.

Practitioners as Knowers

In an underfunded field like adult literacy where lack of resources and training is the norm, it is not surprising to find that most practitioners are fairly creative in adapting and developing materials and curriculum to fit the needs of their students. When I worked for SABES a few years ago, we recognized and drew upon the experience of a number of practitioners who were clearly on the cutting edge of literacy education. In addition, I was also interested to note that even in programs that followed published textbooks, most teachers were cutting and pasting a curriculum to fit the various levels and needs of students rather than following any one book straight through. Intake assessments were the same. No one used the lengthy and involved assessment instruments designed by experts. They all had developed a mixture of interview questions and testing segments to fit the program philosophy and structure as well as the needs of the learners.

One of the reasons that practitioners need to become involved in creating their own knowledge base is that no one else will do it for them. When the International Institute of Rhode Island decided to start a literacy program to meet the needs of the students in their ESL classes who failed to make progress due to their lack of literacy skills, they hoped to hire an expert in adult literacy for non-native speakers of English. Such a person was not to be found even after a national search. Those few people with

the appropriate degree of experience and knowledge were already committed to other programs. Therefore, the International Institute found funding to organize its own action research program and develop their own expertise. Through this effort,

> Literacy/ESL Program staff have engaged in many different learning projects with students, teachers and community service providers, always under the goal of improving access to literacy for adult non-native English speakers. The collaborative efforts of Literacy/ESL Program staff have extended through the Institute with far reaching effects not only for literacy learning opportunities but also for teaching, teacher education and program administration agency wide. In the course of the program, a respect for the expertise already housed in the Institute has developed on the part of administration and teaching staff. [Their] handbook, written for practitioners and by practitioners, documents the development of the program in its many facets and the changes which occurred within the agency and the community during the program (Collignon, Isserlis & Smith, 1991).

Given the self-help nature of the field, it is not surprising then to find that the emerging alternatives to staff development are based on models which start with the experience and knowledge of the participants. Rather than following traditional models that assume practitioners need new theory, demonstration, practice, feedback and coaching, they follow a process like the one developed by Arnold, et. al. (1991).

1. start with the experience of participants
2. look for patterns
3. add new information and theory
4. practice skills, strategize and plan for action
5. apply in action.

In such models, theory and new information from experts are not assumed as a starting point in staff development or teacher training. They are only brought to the table

after the practitioners have had a chance to analyze their own experience and identify patterns of commonality and difference as well as areas of interest and need. The understanding that emerges from a discussion of experience is used to analyze and adapt new information and theory from outside. As in the traditional model, practicing skills is still important, but in recognition that each practitioner faces a unique set of circumstances in her program, an added emphasis is put on strategizing and planning how to use the new skills in action. The key difference between traditional and alternative staff development models is that the practical knowledge of practitioners is respected as the starting point and when new ideas and theory are introduced, the practitioners participate in the critique, analysis and development of new theory, strategies and understanding.

Fingeret (1984) recommended that "community-oriented educators need to articulate some of their underlying assumptions and to unveil the details of some of their processes in order for others to build upon their experience" (p.29). In recent years, there has been a growing trend for practitioners in community-based literacy programs to become involved in creating new knowledge about literacy learning through documenting their own learning experiences and publishing in newsletters and journals such as All Write News (ALRI), Bright Ideas (SABES) and Adventures in Assessment (SABES) published in Massachusetts.

In alternative staff development models, there is a growing trend to include the knowledge and expertise of practitioners in staff development. City University of New York developed a video series now marketed by New Readers Press called "Teacher to

Teacher" (1991) where experienced teachers talk about their personal teaching theories and techniques and model teaching skills in video programs. The System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES) in Massachusetts relies on experienced practitioners to conduct workshops, develop resource kits, do research on special topics, participate in developing statewide assessment models, coach each other, mentor new teachers and provide feedback on state policy.

Practitioners as Knowers in Relation to Literacy Students

In practice, adult literacy education is always a two-way street. The practitioners learn from their students through direct questions and dialogue, through humility and willingness to listen and understand, and through serious observation and reflection. Paulo Freire's writings on literacy education and dialogue is the basis of our understanding of the relationship between practitioners and learners.

> When we consider adult literacy learning or education in general as an act of knowing, we are advocating synthesis between the educator's maximally systematized knowing and the learners' minimally systematized knowing--a synthesis achieved in dialogue. . . . [The educator] can never be a mere memorizer, but a person constantly readjusting his knowledge who calls forth the knowledge of his students. . . . For the educator who experiences the act of knowing together with his students, . . . dialogue is the sign of the act of knowing (Freire, 1985, pp. 54-55).

Freire also points out that learning from practice needs to be guided by theoretical illumination that comes from reading and interaction with other practitioners.

> We have first to get the knowledge about how the people know. . . . It means then to understand the way they speak, their syntax, their semantics. Then secondly we have to invent with the people the ways for them to go beyond their state of thinking. . . . Without practice there is no knowledge; at least it's difficult to know without practice. We have to have a certain theoretical kind of practice in order to know also. But

> practice in itself is not its theory. It creates knowledge, but it is not its own theory. . . . In discussing my practice with the people as an educator, I have to know something more than the people know. At least I have to understand better theoretically what is happening in the people's practice. Reading is one of the ways I can get the theoretical illumination of practice in a certain moment. If I don't get that, do you know what can happen? We as popular educators begin to walk around in a circle, without the possibility of going beyond the circle. (Bell, et al., 1990, p. 98)

There is a great deal of writing about the key role of learners as participants in their own educational process and the importance of practitioners playing a facilitator or supportive role rather than directing the process. However, discussion related to the preparation and training of practitioners is less explicit and clear-cut. In light of the Freirean concepts, it is clear that the most crucial learning for a practitioner comes from dropping old assumptions about education and learning from interaction with learners. However, in actual program practice, there has been a wide range of both failure and success as practitioners have attempted to learn their role simultaneously with the learners.

Jurmo and Fingeret's book on Participatory Literacy Education, has raised a lot of interest in participatory approaches and more practitioners have incorporated many of the practices. however, Jurmo notes that

> Since 1989, when Participatory Literacy Education was published, there has been a real growth of interest in the issues raised in the book. This interest comes from many sources: workplace educators looking for effective ways of putting the principle of contextualization in to practice; volunteer literacy organizations dissatisfied with traditional workbook methods; people from the reading field wanting to see how whole-language theory is being applied in adult literacy settings; community-based educators who have been doing participatory work for years but who now want to see how others are adapting and expanding on

> participatory principles; and literacy students looking for guidance in how to take on leadership roles in student support groups, small-group instructional formats, and other activities.
>
> These developments are on one hand encouraging but on the other frustrating. The frustrations stem from the realization that there remain few mechanisms for these committed people to get together, build on each other's experience, and create a stronger literacy field in the process. In other words, we've made progress, but we still have a long way to go (Royce, 1991, p. 52).

Because participatory approaches depend on being responsive to learners, it is difficult to train practitioners to use these approaches using workshops and short-term strategies that are better suited to top-down methods. Although training the trainer approaches can model and transfer participatory techniques, practitioners also benefit from a support system and opportunities to share ideas and experiences with other practitioners as they work through the complexity of the process.

Smith (1994), Watson & Stevenson (1992) and others have pointed out that there is great need for the collegiality of sharing groups and the practicality of practitioners teaching each other. This peer teaching not only empowers teachers as knowers, but their strategies and topics are more relevant because peers understand the complexity of learning from and with learners as well as the constraints on time and resources that prevent anything from happening quickly. The learning relationship between practitioners can support the learning relationship between teachers and learners. The next section examines the role of practitioners as learners in relation to intellectuals, university based practitioners and staff development professionals.

Practitioners as Knowers in Relation to University-Based Knowers

Although there are a growing number of practitioners seeking out opportunities to learn more about adult literacy theory at universities and through personal reading, there are fundamental problems of language that block communication between practitioners and intellectuals. Most intellectual writing seems to be written for academic forums rather than for real practitioners. A common response from practitioners who struggle through scholarly articles is, "Why do they make this so hard to read? Once you figure it out, you realize they're just talking about the common reality we deal with everyday. I don't need someone to put the ideas into inaccessible language. Our job is to put language into accessible form so that people can use it" (Study Circle Participant).

In implementing the Family Literacy Project through a university-literacy program linkage, Auerbach (1989) found that a training model directed by the coordinator didn't work because the academic readings had little relation to what the teachers were experiencing. A teacher sharing model based on dialogue around teaching insights and concerns enabled the group to better make the leap from research to practice. The project produced two books, Talking Shop (McGrail, et al., 1989) written by the practitioners involved in the project and Making Meaning, Making Change (Auerbach, 1989) written by the university-based project coordinator. The two books together provide a balance of insights on staff and program development written from two perspectives.

As university-based researchers and faculty reach out to work with program level adult literacy practitioners, they also need to apply Freire's injunction to learn the "syntax

and semantics" of how practitioners speak. One such response has come through the practitioner research efforts where "research" is now called "inquiry" because of the negative response of practitioners to the word research. Furthermore, in order to broaden the definition of research to include existing practices and ways of knowing among practitioners, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) have also promoted a teacher as researcher model that proposed new categories of research that was more suited to ways practitioners already collect and organize knowledge. They included teachers' journals, brief or book-length essays by teachers, oral inquiry processes, and classroom studies in their typology.

The inquiry-based approaches to staff development move beyond using practitioners' practical experience for peer coaching, observation and feedback; they view practitioners as people who are able to develop knew knowledge and theory from analyzing their own practice and the practice of others. In recent years, a number of university programs have been experimenting with teacher as researcher models in the K-12 system as well as in adult education. The motivation for Allan and Miller (1990) to explore models of Teacher-Researcher Collaboratives was the realization that a major weakness of university directed reading research over the past three decades was that the results had limited effect on current classroom practice. Their goal in working with graduate students who were already school teachers was that the "teachers [should] be the producers of knowledge by providing evidence to support changes in their teaching strategies, their curriculum development and their student's learning" (p. 197).

The teachers they worked with became more empowered as professionals because the collaborative models gave them the tools, support and opportunity to document their expertise. They asked questions based on their real classroom needs and created solutions for real problems. They verified the effect of their teaching on student learning by collecting, analyzing and interpreting data. They supported and gave feedback to each other at meetings and presented the knowledge which they had produced to other professionals in their field. Miller and Allan conclude that "because teacher researchers are designing their own professional learning, the outcomes of action research have not only immediate impact on the current interaction in classrooms but have the likelihood of producing long-term change (p. 202)."

All types of research--participatory, action, transformative--connected with social change efforts are closely interconnected with the philosophy and practice of adult education. In an article defining transformative research, Deshler and Selener (1991) point out three reasons why such research is so important to adult educators. 1) Research is an act of adult learning. Knowledge generation is a form of learning through inquiry and is part of our professional practice as educators. 2) Adult educators often teach others how to be engaged in knowledge generation efforts. 3) Adult educators share knowledge that is generated through research, make judgements about the quality and relevance of research findings to learners, search for findings that can be used by learners to create a more just and sustainable world, and use or create knowledge for community development.

According to Lytle and Cochran Smith, When practitioners "change their relationships to knowledge, they may also realign their relationships to the brokers of knowledge and power in schools and universities" (1992, p. 459). The power differentials that exist in any collaboration between universities and community-based adult education centers have to be carefully negotiated. The Lindeman Center at Northern Illinois University's College of Continuing Education was founded on the assumption that adult education can and should play a vital role in achieving democratic social change. Their experience of learning to work within the confines of a state university while maintaining a commitment to working with minority communities, the unemployed, the working poor and other marginalized groups has taught them that learning from the community and honoring the autonomy of the community is their most demanding and time-consuming challenge. They find that they must bracket their own agenda as they devise ways in which university resources can be used on behalf of the communities they work with. (Zacharakis-Jutz, Heaney and Horton, 1991).

Example of an Alternative Staff Development Approach: Adult Literacy Participant Inquiry Project (ALPIP)

Lytle, et al. (1992a) propose inquiry-based staff development as a promising approach to address the needs for improved practice and research on practice in the field of adult literacy. Inquiry-based staff development builds on the experience and knowledge which practitioners bring with them to the field and develop as they work in programs. It relies on practitioners to pose problems and conduct field-based inquiry into their daily practice. Inquiry-based staff development positions practitioners as learners,

researchers and reformers working in collaboration with university researchers. The Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Project (ALPIP) was designed to investigate the potential for using inquiry-centered staff development to rethink practice and research, and to generate new field-based knowledge about adult literacy education.

The core activity of the Adult Literacy Participant Inquiry Project is an on-going practitioner research seminar where practitioners from a diverse set of literacy programs in the Philadelphia area explore their programs and practice. In initial interviews, the participants identified the several categories of questions which were important to them to explore in the context of a staff development seminar. 1) The most common type of questions included general questions about the practice of teaching adults and how to improve teaching. 2) The second category related to self-evaluation and how to reflect on and critique one's own practice. 3) The third type of questions focused on program concerns such as administration, philosophies, evaluation strategies and staff development, etc. 4) The fourth type of questions were geared towards concerns related to current research issues in the field such as the meaning of learner-centered or the debates around phonics. 5) The fifth category included questions about the fundamental assumptions that underlie goals, politics, and policies in the field such as race, class and gender issues and conflicting beliefs about teaching and learning.

This set of questions is an interesting contrast to the content of most existing staff development discussed in the previous chapter. They indicate a desire to go beyond narrow technical questions and address some of the underlying assumptions and beliefs about practice as well as to have an opportunity to reflect on and explore their own

practice. The participants also repeatedly indicated in their interviews that they were looking "for a way to get support, to share ideas and doubts, to learn what others are doing" (Lytle, et. al. 1992a, p. 27).

The ALPIP project focused on one type of inquiry-based staff development called "inquiry-centered" which included the following activities:

> 1. conducting systematic, intentional inquiry into teaching, learning and administration by practitioners in their own program settings;
> 2. organizing inquiry as a social and collaborative process;
> 3. critically analyzing current theory and research from a field-based perspective; and
> 4. making problematic the social, political, and cultural arrangements that structure literacy learning and teaching in particular contexts. (1992a, p. 16.)

However, the creators of this approach do not imply that inquiry-based staff development must be restricted to one best way. Within the range of approaches identified as inquiry-based, there is room for considerable variation. The commonality in inquiry-based approaches is "that they build on what people in the local setting want to know and take into account the material conditions of their practice" (1992a, p. 29).

The initial phase of ALPIP has indicated that practitioners are looking for frameworks and tools to help them build on what they already know and do as well as what they have brought with them from outside the field of adult literacy. Furthermore, the ALPIP experience has shown that there is a need to build supportive networks or communities of practitioners to meet regularly to share ideas and explore issues of adult literacy together.

Because inquiry-based staff development is so closely connected to daily practice, it provides a natural mechanism for many aspects of program development. Moreover, the knowledge generated through inquiry seminars can produce new knowledge about practice for the field and provide a strategy for reconstructing the collaboration between researchers, practitioners and policy-makers. Inquiry seminars provide an opportunity for practitioners to critically read the research and theory coming from university researchers and join the process for creating new knowledge. Both the university and field participants take joint responsibility to document the seminar as a model for staff development and as a source of knowledge about adult literacy.

Summary

In alternative approaches to staff development, the practitioners have a dynamic role. They are not a mere link in a linear transmission model where expert knowers train trainers to train teachers to train students. They are active knowers in the middle of a very dynamic field and participate in both directions to learn as well as to influence knowledge. They are positioned to help "create an ideological unity between the bottom and the top, between the 'simple' and the intellectuals" (Gramsci, 1971, 329). While most practitioners would not be termed "organic intellectuals" as they do not come from the populations which they teach, if they learn their role as knowers and partners in knowledge creation with both the adult learners and with the university educated intellectuals, they can make a difference.

In summary, while there is a growing trend to include the input of practitioners in staff development processes, there needs to be explicit acknowledgement that

experienced practitioners are key knowers and knowledge creators in the field of adult literacy to counteract unspoken assumptions among policy-makers and university-based researchers that "academic" knowledge is somehow better than "practical" knowledge. There needs to be an even greater effort to include practitioners in the further development of the knowledge base of adult literacy education as well as the theory and applications of good practice through helping them develop new research skills as well as skills in training, reflection, writing and designing alternative staff development activities.

In order for this to happen, staff development programs need to establish a climate that supports practitioners in the creation of knowledge. Jaggar (1989) identifies four issues that must be addressed. Practitioners need time that is part of their job description to observe, reflect, think and discuss theories, research and practice. They need freedom and support to take risks - to experiment with new ideas, techniques and materials. They need the support of colleagues because learning is a social process. And finally, they need a work environment that encourages reflection and action.

How can a non-linear staff development process be designed to support practitioners working in the complex social context of literacy education?

Assumptions about time, sequencing and the packagability of skills are among the most difficult things to analyze in Western educational culture. The inservice training models such as the ones adopted by Pelavin and the National ABE Staff Development Consortium carry with them the assumption that discrete teaching skills can be identified and packaged into a structured learning format. They also assume that there can be an

identifiable period of time in which the skills can be mastered and implemented by people in the real world or at least in a simulated practicum experience. Finally, in packaging information and skills practice into a workshop for a group of participants, they assume that each person in the group can learn and implement the new practice within the same time frame.

Part of the problem with much of the traditional research on the effectiveness of staff development is that they are too focused on listing criteria of what would be ideal rather than trying to document how teachers really incorporate new theory and skills into their practice. Evaluation, if it is done at all, is often in the form of a questionnaire handed out at the end of a workshop or report-outs at a follow-up session. While evaluation questionnaires provide feedback on the training methods used, they give little information about what kind of process the practitioner went through in order to implement the new practices, if in fact she did implement them. Reporting back and sharing feedback at follow-up sessions provide some information, but it is rarely documented and is generally used to "prove" that the cause-effect relationship between workshops and practice can continue to be taken for granted.

It has been well documented in the K-12 research that external efforts to control or change classroom instruction through prescriptive materials, inservice training, and elaborate evaluations ultimately fail and teachers maintain relative control over what goes on in their own classrooms (See Joyce, Showers, and Rolheiser-Bennett, 1987). Part of the reason for this is that the learning process is not a clear-cut, linear process

especially when it involves taking action and implementing new strategies in the complexities of the real world.

People who view staff development as a set of knowledge and skills to be transmitted to teachers have a very linear assumption about the nature of learning. Recent research on the social context of literacy is expanding our understanding of the functions and uses of literacy and forcing practitioners and researchers to take a much broader view of both literacy education and staff development for literacy educators. This section looks at the impact which research on the social context of literacy has had on our understanding of curriculum and staff development. It is divided into three parts: 1) Social Context of Literacy, 2) Implications for Practice and for Staff Development, and 3) An Example of an Alternative Staff Development Approach.

Social Context of Literacy

Brian Street's (1984) concept of autonomous and ideological models of literacy provides a useful dichotomy to illustrate how the social context of literacy impacts on both program practice and staff development efforts. People who operate under the assumptions of Street's autonomous model see literacy (and by implication staff development for literacy practitioners) as an independent set of skills that can be standardized and applied to any situation. On the other hand, those who operate under the assumptions of his ideological model see literacy (and by implication the staff development for literacy practitioners) encapsulated within complex cultural settings and structures of power.

Although adult literacy practitioners may not necessarily be reading all the theoretical articles, they are aware of the contradictions and complications in their everyday practice. While they may be trying to teach a discrete set of skills called reading and writing, they cannot ignore the issues of language, poverty, work schedules, local knowledge, power, cultural traditions, freedom of expression, women's oppression, race and class issues, and simple basic needs that confront them and their students on a daily basis.

Although there is a need among literacy practitioners to sort out the relationship between literacy, education and all these issues and complications, the current construction of modern societies has put education in a box that is separated from the boxes of housing, employment, welfare, food, etc. Historically, literacy practitioners along with formal school teachers have been socialized and trained to work in the narrowly defined field called education. The mainstream staff development topics reflect this social assumption.

One way that staff development organizations are attempting to bring social context into the picture is to provide more information on the topic through the traditional workshops and resource materials. For example, the ABLE Sampler mentioned in Chapter II includes Social Context; Diverse Populations; and History, Philosophy and Politics among the nine categories of study in its resource guide. However, they are presented in a context of academic topics, as opposed to an exploration of literacy and life in the social context of particular literacy programs and communities.

On the other hand, staff development programs that invite practitioners to initiate their own sharing groups, study circles and inquiry projects provide space for practitioners to explore the impact of their real social context of their students, their program and the relevance of their curriculum. For obvious reasons, a staff development model that insists on being contextually specific is not readily embraced by policy-makers and staff development organizations that are embedded in autonomous assumptions and focused on organizing centrally planned, large scale staff development programs. Yet, the research shows that local and regional staff development activities are preferred to statewide and national models. (Sherman, et al., 1991). Furthermore, it is not impossible to set up guidelines and structures for local groups to design their own relevant, contextually specific staff development strategy.

Another reason that social context theories are essential to the emerging alternatives for staff development is that recent research in the study of literacy practices indicate that there is great diversity in the ways people use reading and writing skills, interact with texts and are impacted by their surrounding literate environment. Numerous researchers (Barton, 1994; Hamilton, et. al. 1994; Heath, 1983; Scribner and Cole, 1981; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) who use ethnographic approaches to understanding the meaning and uses of literacy refer to "literacy practices" and "literacy events" as they analyze the social interactions, human relationships and social constructs that define the use of literacy.

Their research demonstrates that reading and writing are not isolated skills, but part of a larger event or practice that is always embedded in a particular social context.

In fact there are many types of literacies, each with their particular use and importance in a given community. When we begin to examine how and why literacy is acquired within a specific socio-cultural context, we begin to see that literacy practices and events carry a variety of cultural meanings as well as interpersonal and practical implications.

For example, Paul Davies' (1994) study of long term unemployment and literacy revealed that "the seemingly straightforward question of whether people with literacy difficulties have problems in getting jobs" was far more simplistic than the resulting complex variety of answers. He found that not everyone viewed reading and writing as their main problem and didn't understand why literacy was necessary when the job they were seeking involved very little reading and writing.

However, the people interviewed in the study acknowledged that the methods they had used to obtain jobs in the past through informal methods such as recommendations by friends or being hired on the spot by a supervisor after a short chat were increasingly being replaced by the need to fill out forms and to register at the employment center. Changes in the socio-cultural and bureaucratic context of employment were increasing the literacy demands and barriers for jobseekers. But the simple technical skills for filling in forms were not sufficient. The jobseekers also faced a range of literacy demands related to understanding and interpreting the intent behind written questions and statements, deciding what kind of information should be written, organizing information, and maintaining records of all sorts of things related to previous jobs, dates, etc.

Clearly this broader understanding of the social context of looking for a job reveals areas of training beyond the scope of most job-oriented literacy texts. Furthermore, insights into the literacy context of the employment office reveal that literacy practices there may warrant modification that would be far more effective than setting up more literacy centers to prepare people to deal with the paperwork needs of an overly functional bureaucratic system.

Implications for Practice and for Staff Development

The implications of social context research are that literacy must be defined and firmly grounded in the place where instruction is being carried out. This means that practitioners must draw upon a great deal of local knowledge as well as input from learners in designing learning activities. New understandings and insights about the social functions and uses of literacy have implications for the community role of literacy practitioners as well as for what is taught in literacy classes and how it is taught. Although there is a growing amount of dialogue and collaboration between social context researchers, who identify and describe literacy practices and events in specific communities, and practitioners, who help adult learners deal with literacy problems from their social context on a daily basis, there needs to be a more organized and supported effort to help programs identify ways to embed teaching and learning strategies in the local context of their students.

There is also potential for researchers, practitioners and policy-makers to collaborate to pressure government and private institutions to create more carefully and clearly written materials. The so called "illiteracy" problem in the world today is

partially created by "hyper-literate" lawyers, doctors, politicians, etc. who think they are communicating through a jumble of technical jargon. The Clear Writing initiative in Canada is one such example of a non-classroom based approach (Baldwin, 1990). Teaching literacy in the social context also requires communication and collaboration with people and organizations outside the field of literacy. Recent collaborations between health educators and literacy workers to develop curriculum and materials on AIDS, cancer and anti-smoking provide examples where practitioners in both fields had to step beyond narrow assumptions about easy-to-read language, and deal with cultural and contextual realities that render brochures, posters and traditional mass education strategies ineffective (Dixon, 1993; McGrail & Brucker, 1994; Nash, 1993).

The growing evidence from practitioners who are developing materials and curriculum based on assessment of the local context and needs of local learners show that literacy programs built from an effort to apply social context theories to practice have profound potential (Auerbach, 1989 and 1994; Nash, et al., 1989; Martin, R. 1989, etc.). An understanding of social context theories and current research and practice, combined with participative research skills to explore the local situation should be incorporated into staff and program development for programs that are choosing alternative approaches to literacy education.

Unfortunately, the social context of the adult literacy field makes it difficult for programs to develop local curriculum based on local research. The changing legislation and policies that influence the kinds of literacy program strategies that get funded from year to year (student volunteers, employment preparation, family literacy, welfare

mothers, AIDS education, etc.) are a continual source of frustration to programs attempting to develop continuity for learners within the social context of their community. Programs are continually searching for ways to patch together funding to support local initiatives. Clearly structural change in the funding system would have to accompany staff development for long range program improvement to take effect.

My own observations, which will be described in more detail in chapters V and VI, indicate that as staff developers and researchers, we have very little documentation of what processes are used and how long it really takes to implement new practices in the adult literacy classroom. Particularly when the readiness of learners to respond to a new approach is taken into account, teachers may spend months and years figuring out how to implement even the new practices which they strongly believe in. In the SABES experience in Massachusetts, it is interesting to note that over the past few years, staff development activities have been shifting away from workshops on particular topics to more long range activities like study circles, sharing groups, mini-courses and support groups that can respond in non-linear ways to the complex flow of literacy learning.

Hunter and Harman (1985) place key emphasis on community-based education as the solution for problems encountered in adult education practice. They point out that the form and content of the education program must be specific to the context of the learners. Successful programs design methods and materials to increase learner participation. They define reading not as mastering discreet linguistic skills, but as an interaction between the reader and the text which incorporates language skills being built within the personal and community context. All of these characteristics of successful

community-based education programs rely heavily on the creative input of practitioners who base their instructional agenda on information gathered by continually observing and analyzing how learners learn and use skills and information in the classroom as well as real life.

Hunter and Harman further claim that "to function effectively in community-based education, teachers require on-going training to adjust their thinking and practice from a traditional (reading as decoding) model to one that truly connects learner-context-text-and-response" (1979, p. xv). I would add that such training must go deeper to support teachers in incorporating on-going participatory approaches that engage learners in the curriculum, program and community development process. In order for community-based education to be successful over time and in different locations, community-based practitioners need to be actively participating in creating the knowledge base of educational theory and practice for their program context, and they need to be actively refining their ability to assist and support adult learners to take an active role with them in the process. The following example of an alternative staff development approach applies many of these concepts.

Example of an Alternative Staff Development Approach: Community Training for Adult and Family Literacy Project

Auerbach (1994) and her colleagues designed and implemented a program to train members from the immigrant and refugee communities to be native language literacy and ESL instructors in community-based literacy programs. The underlying philosophy was that the training approach should be consistent with the teaching

approach. Since they were preparing mentors and interns to use a framework for participatory curriculum development, they modeled the participatory processes in the training through classroom-based mentoring, site-based teacher sharing and university-based workshops. The teacher sharing meetings provided a mechanisms to link topics and issues between the training workshop and actual work in the program sites.

The teacher sharing meetings used the following format:

1. Report Back - each person briefly told what they did in class in the past week

2. Identify an issue/theme/topic for exploration - the facilitator (mentor) identifies a theme to focus on, either from the reports or from observation of the interns' practice.

3. Reflect on the issue through structured dialogue - the group explores the issue by addressing questions to identify causes of the problem, possible solutions, or steps in successful processes, etc.

4. Propose alternatives/strategies - each participant including the mentor suggests how he or she might follow up on the issue in their class.

The workshops were designed to introduce a range of tools and theories that are essential to designing curriculum through a participatory process. However, in keeping with their philosophy that the training should model the teaching, they developed each workshop through interaction with the interns and careful listening to find important concerns and themes. Themes from the teacher sharing sessions were introduced in the workshops as lesson content. Tools were introduced in the context of what the interns were observing, learning and working on in class.

One of the interesting findings of the project was that the interns did not necessarily practice using the tool that was introduced in the workshop during the

following two week period. The things they reported back in the next workshop usually had nothing to do with the previous training. After the group reflected on this and discussed why, they realized that this was appropriate. The interns were using principles of participatory curriculum development in deciding when to use or not use the tools. If the tool or activity suggested in the workshop did not fit the current needs of their classroom, they were choosing to do something else. The new tool might be used at a later date.

The on-going interaction between workshops, sharing meetings and practical application not only gave support to interns as they developed new skills and theories over a period of time, it also gave the staff developers insight into what the practice and implementation process really looks like. Contrary to the impressions that are given by neat models charted on paper, practice and implementation take a long time. Only staff development activities that stick with the practitioners much longer than a single follow-up workshop will learn how long it really takes to transform behaviors and practices.

Learning to become a participatory teacher takes time because you have to unlearn old teaching assumptions and practices and relearn new ones. In the project, they found that interns were ready to move from the observation phase to the teaching phase at different times. It was difficult to coordinate the structured training agenda with the changing needs of the participants. One of the difficulties was that their flexibility was reduced because of time constraints that resulted from a slow start-up of the one year grant. The project then had to be implemented through bi-monthly workshops over a period of nine months rather than monthly workshops over a period of a year. They

found that two-hour workshops every other week was not as effective as a previous project which held three-hour workshops on a monthly basis. There was not enough time in workshops to cover the training agenda and also allow sufficient time for spontaneous dialogue and sharing of ideas. The short time between workshops also made it difficult for mentors to fully participate in planning workshops and implementing practices.

Despite the timing constraints, the project had a very positive impact. By working over an extended period of time and having the training reflect the same approach as the teaching, the project succeeded in helping the interns develop new skills and make many changes in their conceptions of teaching. For example, by reflecting on how they used each other as resources in sharing groups, the interns deepened their understanding of how they could facilitate students to be resources in class. The training also changed their notions about their own expertise.

Participatory curriculum development requires a much more sophisticated knowledge about the learning process than traditional textbook driven approaches. But through the three-part system of classroom teaching, sharing groups and workshops, the interns (most of whom had limited formal training) developed some amazing insights into the process as well as skills to cope with unpredictable classrooms. For example, one intern expressed a new understanding of the student and teacher roles: the facilitator "unveils or awakens the soul," and the student "guides the teacher." They learned that lesson plans never go as planned and through discussing this problem with each other learned the skills to integrate planning with responsiveness to the students immediate needs by having "all five senses awake" and knowing how to go with the flow. The

project evaluation interviews also noted changes in self confidence, autonomy and expertise; changes in career and personal goals; and willingness to take on new roles in the community.

The mentors also benefited greatly from the projects. Through teaching and mentoring the interns, they increased their own understanding of participatory training and curriculum development. Reflecting on their own practice enabled them to learn by teaching others. They also acquired new skills and took on new roles in the organization including administrative responsibilities, documentation of the project, supervisory roles, and curriculum and materials development.

Finally, in addition to developing the skills and capacity of new teachers, the training process also had an impact on the three program sites which participated in the project. They diversified the ethnic and language backgrounds of their staff. They were able to serve populations which had previously been unserved because of long waiting lists and lack of resources to train and pay qualified staff. Because of the success of the projects, the program gave new priority to institutionalizing native language literacy and seeking more funding to continue this approach.

The downside of the project lay in the inherent problems in the field of adult literacy itself. First of all, native language literacy is not a priority for long-term funding at the moment. While it was possible to get money for a one year demonstration project, there is much less possibility to find continued funding to sustain such a program no matter how successful it is. Some of the interns and mentors found new teaching jobs after the project ended, others continued to volunteer after funding ran out, some became

involved in fund-raising efforts. Sadly, even when staff development is successful, the system is not well enough developed to sustain as many professional teachers as are needed to deliver the services to the many people on the waiting lists.

Is it possible to create functioning systems and/or organizations to provide a context, continuity and purpose for staff development?

In the previous chapter I reviewed the underfunded, marginalized, sporadic history of staff development in the field of adult education. Clearly, outside a few programs that have taken staff development into their own hands, there is not much structural support for the existence on-going staff development either traditional or alternative. Furthermore, most staff development systems are based on quick-fix linear assumptions that are not in touch with the complex issues of dealing with literacy problems in the social context. This section addresses the issue of structural change that must come about in the field of adult literacy education if we are really serious about supporting teachers and learners.

Professionalization vs. Social Change Strategy

Currently there is increased discussion about "professionalizing" the field of adult literacy education. However, the problem with the concept of professionalization is that it focuses on individual development and assumes the existence of a professional field where there is certification as well as opportunities for career advancement within and between organizations in that field. Professional development is also something which individuals manage for themselves through taking university courses, keeping abreast of new developments in the field, enrolling in degree programs and attending professional

conferences and workshops (See Royce, 1991). Although many adult literacy practitioners have chosen to make their work a profession and are actively engaged in professional development, in reality the field of adult literacy is only marginally a profession.

In spite of a growing professionalization movement in Adult Education to compile an identifiable body of knowledge that will standardize the training of adult educators and to standardize practice in order to make adult education an identifiable service commodity, adult literacy is still the least noticed component in adult education and has few resources in terms of university programs, certification requirements or professional support services. Furthermore, there are unanswered questions regarding whether professionalizing the field would have a detrimental effect on the social change mission of adult literacy. According to Wilson (1993), the social movement that guided the early adult education movement in this country died out in the 50s and 60s and is being replaced by professionalization efforts.

Lindeman, an influential thinker in the early part of this century, believed that adult education would become an agency of progress if its short-term goal of self-improvement could be made compatible with a "long-term experimental but resolute policy of changing the social order" (Adams, 1975, p. 14). The current focus on professionalization seems to reflect the short-term goal of self-improvement and an eagerness to be legitimized by a hierarchal and problematic higher education system.

In contrast to the idea of professionalizing the field, a group of teachers in Massachusetts (Seidman, et al. 1993) came up with the strategy of organizing a union:

Adult/Alternative Educators Interested in Organizing a Union (AEIOU). Indeed, when adult literacy practitioners choose to work with marginalized communities they put their own upward mobility at risk by connecting their career development to a location in the economic system with severe resource shortages and limited opportunities. Although many of the union organizers originally came together to deal with their own working conditions - 12 hour days, piecing together part-time jobs, no benefits, etc. - they also recognized that they had chosen to work in such circumstances because they cared about their students and the quality of education in their classrooms. But how could they talk about empowering students when they were also disempowered, isolated and burned out by job demands.

> People talked of administrative problems, performance standards, funding sources, job security. How do we do this anyways? Yes, we want students to be participants in the world, to speak out, to change their lives. But how do we go about making changes in our own work? Nowhere to go? And what control do we have over what happens in the classroom? Who shapes the nature of our programs? Don't we actually run them based on fear? Are we not afraid to take some degree of control? Am I not? Are we all not troubled and afraid to talk about what goes on in our classrooms? Is open dialogue between teachers so clouded and confused because we always seem so puzzled by: How do we teach? What do we teach? And what are we doing anyways? Are these not issues we face all the time every day? (Seidman, et al., 1993, p. 67)

> Meeting with AEIOU members has taught me, very poignantly, how like our students we really are. Like them, we read the daily "text of our teaching experiences without the context crucial to good comprehension. Like them, when we come up against experiences we can't interpret, we blame ourselves or get angry and stop. We feel powerless, like our students. We do not come to the text of our teaching experiences with the experience or knowledge we need because, in our case, that context comes from *each other*. We cannot do this work in a library or before class. And we cannot do it solely through "sharing" conferences or curriculum development or community meetings or armed encounters

> with funders or legislators because *we are the context* that illuminates the text. We--our knowledge of problems and possibilities--are the context we need so that we can interpret the meanings of our work. This unionizing business shows me that figuring out better teaching methods must be linked with critical awareness--a contextualization--of our actual teaching conditions. We can't do it alone and it can't happen without each other. (Schwartz, in Seidman et al., 1993, p. 68)

Practitioners basically have two options for responding to their location in terms of staff and professional development. They can see themselves as a marginalized group within the existing education system and put energy into professionalizing their field through participation in research, conferences, workshops, courses and lobbying for resources and recognition. Improving the status of adult education through professionalizing the field and legitimizing the expenditure of funds for good programs will provide better quality services for the learners as well as stable careers for practitioners. But it will not necessarily change the society or the system which is producing poverty, illiteracy and other social problems.

The other option is to ally themselves with the communities of adult learners and create community-based theory and practice which redefine the field of adult education. Such a redefinition would need to interconnect education with other daily life issues - such as employment, housing, food, family, interpersonal relations, etc, and redefine the social structures which have segmented the solutions we need for daily living into specialized fields and social service agencies. In the process of redefining education from the bottom up, adult literacy practitioners and learners would also do research, participate in conferences, workshops, do advocacy work and lobby for resources and recognition. However, the end goal would not be to improve the status of their field

within the existing educational and social structure. The end goal would be to bring positive change to the educational and social structures and reconceptualize the notion of professionalization.

Currently, both of these processes are happening in the field of adult literacy. There are many people working to redefine and/or professionalize of the field. The purpose of this dissertation is to look at the issues for staff development among the community-based organizations which are attempting to redefine adult literacy. However, this redefinition is taking place within a context of change in the field itself. There are trends toward professionalization and legitimization as well as toward dramatic social change.

Giroux's notion of teachers as transformative intellectuals is relevant here. He stresses that "teachers must take active responsibility for raising serious questions about what they teach, how they are to teach and what the larger goals are for which they are striving. This means that they must take a responsible role in shaping the purposes and conditions of schooling" (1988, p. 126), or in this case, adult literacy education. Such a role means not only active involvement within classrooms and programs, but also active participation in staff development, professional organizations and advocacy networks to help shape the existence and nature of the field of adult literacy.

The process of creating the field of adult literacy education, therefore, is interconnected with recreating the social structure of education in order to influence broader social change. If we examine Freire's analysis of illiteracy, pedagogy and

oppression, we recognize that literacy practitioners are also participants in the dehumanizing structures.

> These men, illiterate or not, are in fact not marginal. What we said before bears repeating: They are not "beings outside of": they are "beings for another." Therefore the solution to their problem is to become, not "beings inside of," but men freeing themselves: for, in reality, they are not marginal to the structure, but oppressed men within it. Alienated men, they cannot overcome their dependency by "incorporation" into the very structure responsible for their dependency. There is no other road to humanization--theirs as well as everyone else's--other than authentic transformation of the dehumanizing structure (1985, pp. 48-49).

Clearly the choice between professionalization and social change has profound implications for learners, practitioners and society in general. As Demetrion (1993) points out, it is unfair for practitioners to assume that the whole burden of social transformation should be placed on the adult literacy learners. Practitioners also have a vested interest in and responsibility helping to transform the system. Alternative staff development approaches provide strategies that challenge the current system and enable practitioners to collaborate with learners and researchers to identify and implement change.

Role for Alternative Staff Development in Social Change

This section examines how alternative approaches to staff development can play a role in promoting social change through research, advocacy, program level support and following successful models of social change organizations.

Research

Previously, I talked about the importance of practitioners participating in creating the knowledge base for the field through inquiry-based staff development. This process

is not only for the benefit of practitioners and programs, it also has implications for the role of the university as the "source of expert knowledge." Lytle and Cochran-Smith point out that

> legitimating the knowledge that comes from practitioners' research on their own practice is a critical dimension of change in both school and university cultures. In challenging the university's hegemony in the generation of expert knowledge for the field, teacher research also challenges the dominant views of staff development and pre-service training as transmission and implementation of knowledge from outside to inside schools (1992, p. 469).

In negotiating the nature of the emerging field of adult literacy education, there is potential for university-based researchers and program-based practitioners to redefine certification and staff development in ways that transform the exclusiveness of the university into a more democratic partnership for the sharing of academic and practical knowledge. While such a change in one area of the university may seem insignificant, it can demonstrate new options to other parts of the system and contribute practical evidence of the changing perceptions and functions of knowledge in our information society.

According to Scott and Awbrey (1993), universities are likely to undergo a major transformation over the next decade in order to keep pace with the social changes of the information age. They surmise that this transformation will involve a redefinition of nature of education resulting from the melding of liberal learning and professional training as well as a transformation in the nature of scholarship so that it is no longer isolated from society. Clearly the involvement of adult literacy practitioners in the knowledge creation of their field provides a mechanism to facilitate this transformation.

Advocacy

Advocacy for sound policy is one of the critical activities of community-based adult literacy practitioners that is not always taken into consideration in staff development programming. Because of the instability of the field, funding and sustainability of programs is directly influenced by changes in the policies of funders. There is a great need for more staff development activities where practitioners can analyze the socio-economic realities of their program and collaborate on designing and implementing strategies for change.

The Adult Literacy Resource Institute (ALRI) in Boston has sponsored staff and student development programs on this topic. In a flyer inviting both students and practitioners to learn how to contact local legislators and others who make public policy and to learn how to participate in coalitions and group efforts to influence policy decisions, ALRI referred to the following quote by Hanna Fingeret:

> It is difficult, often, simply to feel informed about [the adult literacy field], never mind to feel that it is possible to take a role shaping it. Many of us entered this field primarily because we care about people, about service and education, about the quality of life and about social justice, but we were drawn to practice rather than policy making. For many years, we felt that we could afford to ignore advocacy roles, and that we could ignore each other. Those days are over. Our profession is being redefined for us--by the media, by Chambers of Commerce, by mayors and governors and legislators and business owners. . . . We must rise to this challenge intelligently, politically, and with a generous spirit of collaboration (ALRI, 1992).

Program Level Support

Alterative methods for staff development are based on a fundamental understanding that it takes time and support to implement good teaching practices,

particularly participatory teaching practices. One of the ways that staff development can make an impact on the quality of programs is through providing resources and support for teachers to take the time to reflect and plan their practice.

In Talking Shop, Nash, Cason, Rhum, McGrail and Gomez-Sanford (1989), discuss the important role which project-based, self-directed staff development played on the development of curriculum in their classrooms.

> One of the keys to turning the diversity of our classes into a project strength has been the emphasis we have maintained on teacher sharing. An essential element of the project has been the opportunity of weekly teacher sharing meetings. Every Tuesday we have come together to exchange ideas, support each other in dealing with issues that arise in the classroom, and develop curriculum. Although this time would be considered a luxury in most teachers' schedules, we view it as crucial in preventing isolation and burnout, and in reflecting on and learning from our classes. These kinds of partnerships and support networks between teachers are indispensable in any project which is not following a traditional, pre-planned curriculum model, but which is instead working to develop curriculum with students along the way (p.3).

Another way that alternative approaches can provide program support is through helping organizations analyze their mission and purposes for providing literacy education. A study conducted by the Center for Literacy Studies at the University of Tennessee (Bingman and White, 1992) found that many community-based organizations that saw their mission as organizing for social change were using very traditional functional workbook approaches in their literacy classes. Traditional staff development and popular assumptions reinforced their narrow definitions of literacy and did not help them identify ways to link their literacy program with the social change activities of the rest of their organization. While workshops could provide exposure to knew theories and

approaches to literacy, long term alternative approaches which included researching their program and local situation could enable such organizations to develop a much stronger literacy program that would support their broader social action mission.

Following Successful Models for Social Change

While much of mainstream adult education seems to have focused on short-term self-improvement within the system, the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee is a notable example of a program that has resolutely persisted in a commitment to changing the social order. For this reason, much of the philosophy and practice of Highlander provides useful insights in considering how staff development should be organized to support community-based adult literacy practitioners and programs who are committed to a long-term social change strategy. Three aspects of Highlander's approach are useful to consider: deliberate vagueness, learn from the people, and develop a natural educational process.

Though Highlander is clear about its mission, who it is for and why, deliberate vagueness about its governing concepts allow the people it serves to define for themselves what concepts like brotherhood, democracy, mutuality and united social action mean for their specific location and moment in time. "These ideals change as people change. Highlander changes with them and avoids learning dictated from specific theory, learning that by nature would curtail freedom" (Adams, 1975, p. 206).

Community-based literacy programs also tend to be rather vague about their process because they depend on the learners' interests to define the direction. Staff development by the same token must also include certain vagueness. The staff

development process responds and supports the knowledge the practitioners are creating as they respond and support the learners in another level of knowledge creation. Study circles, sharing groups and inquiry-based staff development models all have certain principles of operation based on democratic sharing, participation in decisions, flexible structure, but they also are vague about specific goals and content because they are dependent on participants to define them.

"There is only one axiom that never changes at Highlander: learn from the people; start their education where they are" (Adams, 1975, p. 206). This popular axiom is easy to repeat, but difficult to actually implement. For one thing, no two learners start in the same place in terms of skill, self-confidence or experience. Community-based literacy programs have to balance building individual literacy skill together with group skills. As the practitioners learn from the adult students and try to figure out where they are, the staff development process needs to support practitioners in figuring out how to develop the complex road of learning together with a group of students. Only by honestly examining where they really are, what they are really doing and where they really want to go can they identify both personal and group strategies that can lead to personal development and social change.

Educational programs at Highlander are not single workshops, they are years of process. In keeping with the first two principles, the educational programs have to develop naturally from the people. They have to be embedded in ways that local people could and would learn. Finally, such a strategy has to be reinforced constantly.

Interestingly, none of these educational principles articulate a social change cause or strategy. It is an embedded assumption that the ideas for action will emerge when the time is right from ideas stirred up in the educational process. The staff and program development process needs to build in an awareness, responsiveness, process and structure to support action. This will be discussed in more detail in chapters V and VI. The final section of this chapter will look at a system-wide effort to change the nature of adult basic education on a state level. The development of the system involved changes in policy and program organization as well as setting up a staff development support system to promote program improvement and staff development.

Example of an Alternative Staff Development Support System: SABES Integrated Program and Staff Development Process

Although the two projects described in sections A and B above are excellent examples of alternative approaches to staff development, such isolated cases cannot solve the extensive need for effective staff development unless there is some corresponding systemic change in the field as a whole. Smith (1994) points out that the quality of ABE cannot be improved by staff development alone even when it is interconnected with program development.

> Policy changes related to funding must change the face of ABE simultaneously. A program which has excellent program and staff development can still be hampered by funders' requirements to follow policies which are at odds with program and classroom changes which suit the learners' needs. Specifically, a staff development system cannot long survive, no matter what its design, if there is no policy or funding to support practitioners participation in staff or program development activities. (p. 63)

The System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES) in Massachusetts was designed to provide staff and program development resources as part of an overall improvement of the adult education system. It grew from a major change in the Massachusetts' Department of Education to set up a new Bureau of Adult Education staffed by people who had previous experience in ABE programs. The Bureau organized four task force groups on staff development, program effectiveness, funding and GED to get input for the new system from the grass-roots practitioner level. The recommendations from the task forces were the basis for a four year plan to institute significant changes the whole system.

Some of the changes that were mandated included smaller classes, higher salaries, more full-time teachers, and more comprehensive services such as counseling for learners. It also built money to support staff and program development into the budget guidelines for all funded programs. This last change made it possible for practitioners to participate in the new staff development opportunities which would be designed and delivered by SABES which was formed in 1990 to provide training and technical assistance to practitioners and programs through five regionally based resource centers located at community colleges, coordinated by a Central Resource Center based at World Education, a private non-profit organization in Boston. The basic design of SABES includes four components: Staff Development, Program Development, Clearinghouse and Research & Design.

The mission given to SABES by the staff development task force was to design and implement a flexible system for development support that recognized the existing

expertise among practitioners and that helped individuals and programs start from wherever they are in terms of philosophy and practice. Given the wide range of programs, interests and needs, this was not an easy task.

Although theories and philosophies of education were seldom explicitly stated, there was a commitment to participatory approaches, a respect for the knowledge of practitioners and an awareness of the implications of social context as well as a commitment to changing the bureaucratic systems that impacted on practitioners as well as adult learners. While describing the complete SABES program is beyond the scope of this paper, some understanding of its process is useful for understanding the context in which the study circle support groups were organized and implemented for this study. I have chosen to summarize a few key points from Smith's analysis and documentation of the evolution of SABES (1994).

1. Informal approach to needs assessment: Although there had been plans for SABES to start with a formal needs assessment survey, the planning group chose to collect information about needs, interests and resources through face to face interactions such as visiting programs, talking to directors, teachers and counselors, phone calls, informal discussions with small groups, workshop evaluations. Although such an approach is harder to tabulate for formal reports, it provided a much more comprehensive sense of the concerns and interests among programs and practitioners. Furthermore, the process helped to build a supportive and interactive network between people within the regions.

2. Practitioner Involvement: From the beginning SABES recognized the expertise of practitioners and hired experienced people to provide workshops and technical assistance and to help develop materials and curriculum kits. A concerted effort was made to develop leadership and training skills among promising teachers so that the pool of trainers continues to grow. Mini-grants (around $500) were awarded to individuals or groups for proposals to create new materials or curricula for their program and document their process and products for use by others.

3. Alternative Approaches: In the beginning, workshops were the most common approach because they were easiest to organize. But the regional coordinators soon recognized that practitioners needed longer term exposure to ideas and more time to implement things into their practice. They began to encourage and support nontraditional activities such as study circles, peer observation, coaching, mini-courses, institutes, mentoring, teacher inquiry, individual self-directed study, etc. and continue to look for innovative ways to involve practitioners with all types of learning styles and interests.

4. Process Approach: The original SABES mandate called for a core background curriculum for all teachers. This presented a difficult challenge to figure out what single core curriculum could fit the needs of such a diverse group of program types and philosophical approaches to adult education. In the end, they developed an integrated staff and program development process to guide each program in developing a strategy to identify and prioritize their strengths and needs, and develop in-house staff development activities to strengthen the program. SABES provided training for development

facilitators in each program and resources to help programs carry out their plans through the variety of activities described above.

Each Resource Center is part of a system-wide clearinghouse that enables practitioners to access resources on any are of staff or program development. The goal of this process was to build the capacity of every program to provide rich staff development opportunities at their own site and to organize those activities to improve the quality of the program. Each program was free to adapt the process to fit its own needs.

> In programs where staff were accustomed to meeting and discussing program and staff issues, the Staff Development Process fit neatly into their regular pattern of participatory planning and added only a specific focus for discussion and some handy forms for documentation. But in programs (and there were many) that had no steady history of meeting regularly or of discussing program or staff issues, the Staff Development Process was a real departure. In such programs, where the director was supportive, staff found the Process extremely helpful not just in planning for staff development, but also for opening up discussion on program-related issues which had never been discussed; it represented one of the first and few opportunities for the whole staff to talk together. However, in programs without a regular history of working together as a staff, and where the director was not supportive or programs had a very hierarchical structure, the Staff Development Process was more difficult to implement. Facilitators in these programs received either conflicting instructions from directors or were unable to implement the Staff Development Process with the staff as a whole at all. (Smith, 1994, p. 33)

5. Research: The original SABES design included a Research and Design component that was put on the back burner because there was not sufficient funding and there were too many other immediate needs which had to be resolved. However, during the start up phase, there was extensive discussion about taking a teacher research approach with the R&D section. The commitment to practitioner involvement in research activities carried over into many other activities such as mini-grants, an on-

going project to share innovative assessment strategies, etc. Eventually, a math team was funded to do teacher inquiry on math instruction. Over time, the foundation has been laid for inquiry-based staff development projects.

> An important lesson from SABES' experience is that "teacher research" cannot be pushed as a concept before initial needs for staff development are satisfied, and inquiry-based staff development needs to be viewed and supported as staff development which is first and foremost a way for practitioners to find out what they need to know and not primarily as a way to increase the knowledge base in the field (Smith, 1994, p. 39).

In conclusion, the SABES Staff Development System with all its varied approaches to meet immediate needs and its systematic process to help programs integrate their staff and program development efforts, was not built directly from information presented in the literature on effective staff development. It grew out of the needs and participation of real practitioners and programs, and adapted itself to fit the existing constraints of adult education in Massachusetts. Smith summarizes the experience with nine principles of effective staff development for ABE practitioners:

1. It should be offered in more than one event and be spaced over time, if it is to improve educational practice; i.e. one-shot workshops are ineffective.

2. It should include a variety of models which will help practitioners change their practice; i.e., more than passive attendance at a workskhop is required for real change and improvement to occur. (SABES offers all five models suggested by Sparks and Loucks-Horsely)

3. It should offer a variety of staff development activities so that practitioners can choose a structure for participating that matches their learning style and level of growth in a particular content area.

4. It should take place within a supportive context in order to improve the quality of education students receive; the culture of the program is related to the impact of the staff development program.

5. It should include a component of collegiality and networking among practitioners, including practitioners serving as trainers/staff developers for their peers.

6. It will be more effective when practitioner take an active role in systematically assessing their own needs for staff development and have a role in planning and developing activities which address those needs.

7. It should incorporate principles of adult learning.

8. It should be systematic, with continuous, on-going evaluation mechanisms built into the system.

9. It should be accessible.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the SABES experience is the long-term commitment to instituting a system that promotes program-based staff development supported up by a variety of regionally-based staff development approaches and resources. This type of long-term approach is rarely tried and rarely documented due to short-sighted policies and the short-term nature of demonstration project funding. It will be interesting to see how the system fares in the renegotiation of funds in the coming year.

Summary

In reviewing the prevailing trends and emerging alternatives, it appears that although established assumptions about staff development still prevail nationally and in the majority of states and programs, the theory and practice of emerging alternatives is definitely having an influence. Some policy-makers, practitioners and researchers are mixing the approaches seemingly without clear understanding of the underlying contradictions and conceptual differences. Lytle, et al., (1992a) noted that sometimes the

literature lacks coherent conceptual frameworks resulting in a situation where the traditional language of knowledge transmission and training sometimes co-exists with recommendations calling for alternative formats, action research and bottom-up initiatives. Demetrion (1993) makes a similar observation about Literacy Volunteers of America's 1990 Catalogue, where both top-down functional literacy approaches and bottom-up empowerment approaches were recommended as useful reading for adult literacy practitioners. In practice, SABES has an underlying commitment to promoting alternative approaches, but at the same time, it provides some traditional top-down activities in response to programs committed to traditional functional literacy philosophies.

This mixing of assumptions about approaches indicates a critical need for more staff and professional development on all levels of the field of adult literacy from the policy-makers and researchers to the practitioners. There is a need for more experimentation and documentation of alternative approaches and the development of some stronger principles and guidelines for staff development. Due to lack of research, very little is known about the actual process which practitioners go through as they are acquiring the knowledge and skills which they need to do their job well. The purpose of the present study is to document insights which can be gained form listening to community-based literacy practitioners and to document one alternative approach to staff development called a study circle support group.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

In this study I am using a qualitative research process to study a collaborative inquiry process. This results in a rather complex situation where there are multiple uscs and interpretations of the information as well as a layering of methodologies. In order to clarify the layers of approaches, I have chosen to describe the methodology in three sections. The first section describes the research approaches which influenced the design of the study circle itself as well as for the analysis of the study circle process. The second section focuses more specifically on the design and purpose of the study circle support group and the research streams which guided its creation. The third section describes the methods I used to collect and analyze data for this dissertation. These three methodological descriptions will set the stage for the presentation and analysis of the findings presented in chapters V and VI.

Research Approaches That Influenced the Research Design

In approaching this research study, I began with the underlying premise that the local situation of each adult literacy program is sufficiently unique and complex, that all practitioners should have or should develop skills to research and analyze the context where they are working and be able to develop their own locally appropriate theory, materials and curriculum for teaching. (See Street, 1984 and Smith, 1987). In order to accomplish a personal career goal of being able to work with practitioners in diverse settings, I wanted to develop a cooperative research strategy for working together with practitioners to analyze local situations and develop locally relevant theory, materials and

curriculum. In order to accomplish this, I needed to learn more about how community-based literacy practitioners viewed their work, how they talked about their work and what issues were important to them, so that I could develop an approach for working with them that came from their world of practice rather than from my world of university-based research..

Therefore, the goal of my research effort was not to produce a document that would summarize information about a select group of community-based literacy practitioners for dissemination and replication. Given my conviction that each community-based literacy program depended on practitioners who were researchers, materials and curriculum developers and community organizers; I was more interested in creating, testing and documenting a staff development process appropriate for practitioners who were also interested in developing their skills in these areas. For myself, I wanted to answer the following questions:

1. What insights can academic researchers and staff development professionals gain from listening to what community-based practitioners talk about?

2. What insights into knowledge creation can we gain from listening to how practitioners articulate theory and practice in their own words?

3. What guiding principles for designing staff development experiences and support for community-based literacy practitioners can be gained from the two previous insights?

My goal was to understand the everyday world view of literacy practitioners through dialogue and collaborative research in a study circle support group in order to design a responsive university-based program that would support and prepare practitioners who work with adult learners to develop community-based literacy

programs and materials that are contextually appropriate. In many ways, the study focuses on understanding and using research processes as educative tools for training practitioners. The three research questions guide my work as a practitioner and a researcher. As a literacy professional engaged in staff and program development, I am using the opportunity to do doctoral research to improve my own practice and ability to work with literacy practitioners who are linking literacy education with community development and social change.

In these days of shifting paradigms and the expansion of qualitative research, it is important to discuss my position as a researcher and the perspectives which influence my research design so that the description of how data was collected and analyzed has a meaningful theoretical context. The research approaches which have influenced the design of this study include feminist, action, practitioner, qualitative, ethnographic and participatory research. Of particular interest to me are the critical perspectives in each of these research approaches that focus on redefining the research perspectives, the relationship with the research subjects and the connection between research and action.

Feminist Research

Dorothy Smith's work on developing a feminist sociology (1987) emphasizes the importance of relocating the research viewpoint in the everyday world of real people rather than in the constructs of social institutions. She talks about the viewpoint of "the everyday world as problematic" referring to the place where people are located physically and socially, the place where experiences arise and are organized. However, locating a research focus in the everyday world of practice does not mean merely

confining the inquiry to the everyday world. Locating the inquiry within the everyday world of practitioners enables them to discover how their "own situations are organized and determined by social processes that extend outside the scope of the everyday world and are not discoverable within it." [1]

A method of inquiry that explicates the everyday world as a problematic, therefore, does not begin with the categories of educational research and discourse. The term problematic should not be confused with solving educational problems or observing educational phenomena as previously defined by educational researchers and professionals. "Rather it proposes an inquiry intended to disclose how activities are organized and how they are articulated to the social relations of the larger social and economic process" (Smith, 1987, p. 151). This perspective influenced our decision to choose the Social Context of Literacy as the topic for the study circle and it influenced me to focus data analysis on how practitioners talk about the relationship between the larger socio-economic community and the learning experiences they create for their classes.

Because the location of the practitioners' role places them in closest contact with the world of the adult learners, they are in a better position to experience the incongruities and contradictions of the field than are others in the profession, i.e. the policy-makers and academic researchers. (See Figure 4.1 on next page.)

For example, in the field of adult literacy and basic education, policy which allocates funding directly influences program design options. If policy-makers are concerned with retraining an unemployed workforce, large amounts of money will be available for basic education connected to job training and employment programs. If policies allocate funding for welfare mothers or homeless families, it is assumed that programs will be designed to meet the needs of the clients and the requirements of the funders.

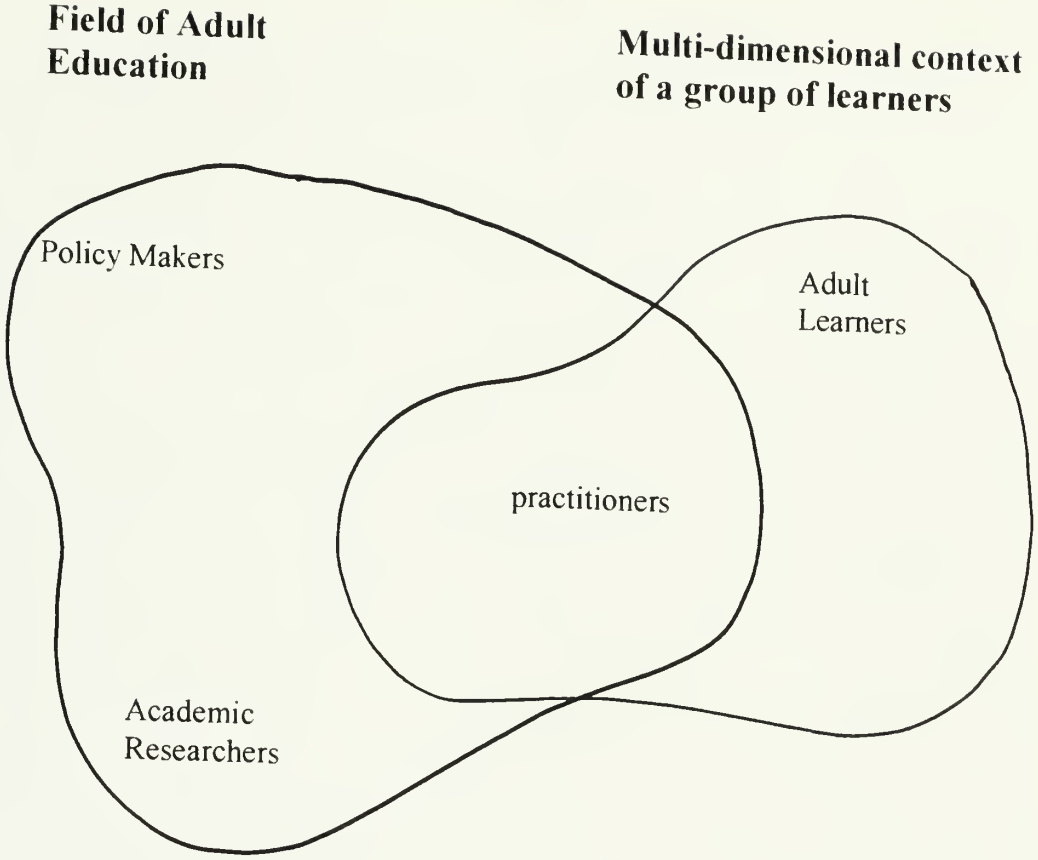

Figure 4.1 Practitioners' Location in the Context of Adult Education

The practitioners are located strategically in the middle. They are employed by the field of adult education. But the nature of their job puts them in contact with the learners who bring expectations from the practical context of their multi-dimensional world. They are in a position to learn from and be changed by the experiences and knowledge of the learners in their program. Because the everyday working world of practitioners is influenced by two contexts, they are in a position to generate innovative ideas and practices as they try to meet demands from the policy makers and learners at

the same time. They are also in a position to feel disempowered by the inability to change or influence either system in a significant way.

Action Research

Although I was inspired by Dorothy Smith's concept of the everyday world as problematic in articulating part of my theoretical stance, I am not a sociologist and I find that I need to reassess her assertion that problematic should not be confused with solving educational problems. While I agree that the term problematic should not be confused with problem solving, as an educational researcher, I must be concerned with problem-solving. As my third question indicates, the purpose of my research project was to figure out how to design more effective staff and program development experiences for adult literacy practitioners. My past experience with workshops and other forms of training used with adult educators had demonstrated to me that these approaches do not provide sufficient on-going support or opportunity for discussion to enable practitioners to carry out the kind of complex materials and curriculum development which the social and economic contexts of literacy programs and learners demand.

I was motivated mostly by the practical need to develop and test an alternative approach to workshops and inservice training. It didn't seem practical to spend the time collecting information on practitioners' perspectives, knowledge and insights without also figuring out how to incorporate their ideas into a new staff development model. According to Carr and Kemmis, in their book Becoming Critical, educational research by its very nature ought to be action research.

> At the outset, then, it is important to recognize that since it is the investigation of educational problems that provides educational research with whatever unity or coherence it may have, the testing ground for educational research is not its theoretical sophistication or its ability to conform to criteria derived from the social sciences, but rather its capacity to resolve educational problems and improve educational practice. For this reason, any account of the nature of educational research that simply transforms educational problems into a series of theoretical problems seriously distorts the purpose and nature of the whole enterprise. Indeed, to disregard or ignore the practical nature of educational problems in this way will so deprive them of whatever educational character they may have, as to ensure that any claim to be engaged in <u>educational</u> research, rather, say, than some form of social scientific research such as sociology or psychology, cannot be seriously maintained (1986, p. 109).

Therefore, while my evolving research design is situated in the theoretical concept of the everyday world as problematic in order to locate the work in a specific context and thereby analyze connections to the larger social constructs, it is also situated in the theoretical concepts of action research in order to identify ways to do something about the constraints surrounding staff and professional development opportunities available to adult literacy practitioners. The two approaches overlap in that Carr and Kemmis also stipulate that educational action research must also be grounded in concrete experience, located in a specific context and use practice to determine the value of theory.

Practitioner Research

The first time I came across Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1990) work on teacher research, I knew that I wanted to develop support systems for teacher researchers as part of the work I was doing for the Literacy Support Initiative and the System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES). It ended up taking many years to lay the

groundwork for such an endeavor. The original plan for my dissertation was to develop and document a practitioner research project. However, at the time, practitioners were not interested to commit themselves to such an endeavor. I compromised by using the study circle to introduce concepts of practitioner research in a less intimidating way than a formal research project. I incorporated several aspects of practitioner research including observation, journal keeping and an oral inquiry approach. The response to this effort will be discussed in chapters V and VI.

The most important contribution of the practitioner research approach to the design of this study is that I am defining myself as a practitioner researcher, and approaching the inquiry from the status of a practitioner, not just a doctoral student. I am involved in staff development for adult literacy and I want to continue to train practitioners and help develop innovative programs. My future practice depends on my being able to understand the field I am working in and the role which research can play as an educative tool for staff and program development. The work I am currently doing and the regular interaction that I have with practicing literacy teachers informs my understanding of the issues in the field. I view my daily work and my personal insights as part of my data resources. In this study, I am the facilitator of the study circle that I am researching and the analysis of my own participation in that role is a critical part of the research analysis.

The insights gained from this study inform the work I do with the Literacy Support Initiative, where I am actively experimenting with various ways to support and institutionalize staff development approaches which engage practitioners in producing

knowledge and theory about their own practice. In the process of producing this dissertation, my work as a practitioner has contributed to and detracted from the ability to create a document that strictly fits the criteria of a doctoral dissertation. The practitioner aspect of my role in this study has stretched the time it takes to complete the process, has broadened my focus to multiple, inter-related causes and has continually reminded me of the critical, and sometimes minute, differences between practitioner needs in different settings that demand that the process be repeated in every new setting rather than the findings be disseminated for the general knowledge of all.

Finally, the practitioner-research approach has provided me with a framework for analyzing the data I have collected from the study circle support group process. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) have developed a framework for working with communities of teacher researchers to describe what they do and how they operate. The "framework provides four perspectives on teacher-research communities: the ways in which communities organize time, use talk, construct texts, and interpret the tasks of teaching and schooling" (p. 90). I have adapted this framework to organize the analysis and presentation of my data in chapters V and VI.

Qualitative Research

The commonality in all of the research approaches which have influenced my research design is that they are all types of qualitative research. The essential characteristic of qualitative research approaches is that the details of the design emerge and are developed from the research process. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) have identified

the following characteristics of qualitative research design which describe and give legitimacy to the process I have followed.

* a detailed procedure is not formed prior to data collection
* finding the questions is part of data collection
* the design is flexible
* design decisions are made throughout the study
* data analysis is ongoing, not just at the end

Detailed Procedure is Not Formed Prior to Data Collection

Although a detailed outline for the study circle was submitted to two sets of participants to get the process going, the dissertation proposal was written simultaneously with the implementation of the study circles. The dissertation proposal was submitted after the study circle had completed ten sessions and had agreed to allow the transcripts to be analyzed for my dissertation. This order enabled us to develop a good participatory working relationship and to follow the explicit and implicit decisions of the study circle group rather than the regimented outline of a preplanned research process.

Finding the Questions is Part of Data Collection

The initial research questions that motivated this study focused on the uses and possibilities of practitioner research in developing the field of adult literacy. Observation and participation in the preliminary study circles indicated that my original assumptions about practitioner research were all wrong and that I needed to back up and focus on studying how practitioners learned from their own experiences before I could superimpose a research agenda on their practice. Furthermore, questions that were developed for the dissertation proposal based on early findings proved to be too broad

when it came to analyzing the data with the framework of how practitioners organize time, use talk, construct texts, and interpret tasks.

In my opinion, developing questions for qualitative research is much like playing the game show, Jeopardy - you get the answers, and then you have to guess what questions must have been asked. The rules inherited from traditional research insist that research starts with a question. In my case I started with a problem to solve, but it was participation in an inquiry process that clarified for me what I was looking for as well as what it was possible to look for and describe within the construct of a doctoral dissertation.

The Design is Flexible

Since I was working with the schedules and realities of working practitioners, and attempting to design a responsive staff and professional development support system, I had to work within the time constraints of all the participants including myself. From the second session onward, the design of the study circle changed to accommodate the participants. And consequently, the design of my research changed to accommodate the changes in the study circle. In fact, the flexibility of the study circle design became a topic of study for my dissertation research. This issue will be discussed in greater detail under the section on Task in Chapter V.

Design Decisions Are Made Throughout the Study

As mentioned previously, research design was happening on two levels throughout the study. On one level, design decisions were being made by the study circle participants through regular formative evaluation exercises in selected sessions. On the other level, I

was responding to the amount of data I was collecting and making decisions about how to focus my research and design a manageable dissertation. The most critical decisions included the following.

1. When I started the study circle project, I had two groups going that I intended to compare. When I realized the amount of information generated by one group, I made the decision to write my proposal for a case study rather than a comparative study.

2. I started the project with a plan to incorporate two levels of practitioner research - a staff development practitioner researching teacher researchers researching their classrooms. This was not only too complex, but the teachers themselves were not interested to start that kind of committed research project.

3. I accumulated too much data and too many research avenues became available. When it came time for analyzing and reporting, I made a decision to focus on the group discussion and limit the amount of attention I would give to interviewing and understanding how each participant understood and used the study circle information in their practice.

4. I made a decision to go with the flow. In my original conception of the study circles, I envisioned myself transcribing tapes and bringing back an analysis of themes to the next session. In fact this was logistically impossible due to my outside work load. However, it also prevented me from directing the agenda with my interpretation and enabled each member of the group to go their own direction. The changing work environment determined the direction of our discussion, rather than my identification of themes from analysis of a previous session. Initially it seems that we jumped to a new

topic at each session. However, a more thorough review of tapes and notes indicated that key themes re-emerged over time. Discussions of issues seem to make more sense when they are dealt with as they emerge and re-emerge rather than when the outside facilitator schedules a topic to be discussed.

Data Analysis is Ongoing, Not Just at the End

It was helpful to use Cochran-Smith and Lytle's time, talk, text and task heuristic for early analysis. Applying these four dimensions to my observation enabled me to see what was happening in terms of process in the study circle. My observations and interpretation of actions, decisions and events in each of these dimensions provided an on-going framework for analytic dialogue between me and the study circle participants. As I worked with the data from the transcripts and went back to the participants for more information, I refined the analysis and organization of the data. In many ways the most important part of the research was making sense of the data through organizing and analyzing it from multiple perspectives.

Ethnographic Research

Given my concern to understand staff development issues from the everyday world viewpoint of the literacy practitioners, I needed research techniques that would enable me not only to understand what topics and issues were important to practitioners, but how practitioners articulated theory and practice in their own words. Techniques used in ethnographic research to understand a culture from an insider's perspective were helpful in planning my research approach. My previous experience using Spradley's (1980) participant-observation guidelines influenced how I listened to and observed

literacy practitioners talking about their work. At times I made deliberate choices in facilitating the study circles to listen and participate in conversations as a participant observer rather than to take on the role of staff development coordinator. Other times, my role was more clearly defined as being a very observant participant (Erickson, 1986), as I took on the role of facilitator in order to guide the process or get feedback on what we were doing. Finally, as I read transcripts, looked for categories and identified types of talk and emerging themes, I drew upon Spradley's concepts of domain analysis and paid attention to using the practitioners own language to describe things.

Participatory Research

As mentioned before, research approaches were used on two levels in the study. The first level included me, as academic researcher, collecting data, documenting the participation of practitioners in study circle support groups, and making meaning from the transcripts. The second level involved the study circle participants in the research process. Through regular discussion of our process, the participants helped form the study circle. They also used information and the process of the study circle for their own personal and programmatic development.

The motivation for piecing together a multi-layered, participatory approach for my research methodology stemmed from the influence on adult literacy education of Paulo Freire's (1970 & 1985) theories of education for empowerment and social change. He argues that people should not be passive objectives of academic education, but rather active participants in the learning processes. The methods of participatory action research (see Fals-Borda, 1984; Horton, 1981; Lather, 1986; Park, 1993) are also based

on this same premise: people should not be passive objects of academic research but rather active participants in the research process.

Although the study circle support group was not an authentic participatory research project where people from the most oppressed groups work together for social change, I felt it was important to draw upon certain principles of participatory research because adult literacy education is part of the social construct which impacts on the lives of marginalized people and ultimately adult literacy educators must take an active part in the social change process. In designing staff and program development strategies for community-based literacy programs, it is important to see the program as one of the players in the social change process. If participatory processes are key strategies at the grassroots level, they must be mirrored in any organizational effort that is connected to the grassroots. Therefore, the practitioners were not passive participants in the study circles. They actively contributed to the structure, content and process as we developed it together.

In many ways, Paulo Freire's description of his early work with literacy learners "trying to learn from them how to work with them" (Bell, et al. 1990) describes both my role as researcher and study circle facilitator as well as the role of the participants in discussing their interactions with learners. The study circle became a place for all of us to analyze how to work with each other and with the adult learners in the various programs. Furthermore, our topic, the social context of literacy and the process we used to explore it was an appropriate forum for understanding Freire's description of the literacy process:

> The adult literacy process as an act of knowing implies the existence of two interrelated contexts. One is the context of authentic dialogue between learners and educators as equally knowing subjects. . . . the second is the real, concrete context of facts, the social reality in which men exist. (Freire, 1985, p. 51).

The community-based literacy program that I selected for my study has a commitment to social change and education for empowerment. The discussion in the study circle and the way they described their work reflected their efforts to develop participatory curriculum approaches that engaged adult learners in the authentic dialogue that lead to social action and community development. While it is beyond the scope of my study to document the full range of their efforts, in attempting to develop a participatory staff development experience for literacy practitioners, I designed a study circle approach which enabled them to discuss how to develop their practice to promote understanding and action around local issues of community development, social change and learner empowerment.

This final research approach that influenced the design of my study brings us back to the fundamental reason for why community-based practitioners should be involved in identifying and developing skills and knowledge in the field of adult literacy and basic education. Community-based practitioners are working with learners from economically and socially marginalized populations. Education is a hollow promise for an improved life for most of these people because the standard texts and approaches provide generic skills that are not connected with the realities of their local context. It is the responsibility of locally based practitioners (program directors, counselors and other staff as well as teachers and facilitators) to work with adult learners to develop learning

experiences that have real-world applications. No matter how innovative their materials, each practitioner has to do the work at the local level to understand the needs and issues from the perspective of the learners and help them acquire skills and knowledge to change their personal and community context. This is no small process. Practitioners committed to social change need on-going support on many levels as they work with learners to identify and implement appropriate learning strategies.

It is vitally important that the support systems follow the same participatory processes and philosophies that are being practiced at the program level, so that learning continues to move up through the educational system to challenge existing assumptions, practices and structures. Many academics, policy-makers and funders talk about the need for social change. But it is left for the practitioners and learners to actually bring the changes into reality. Hunter and Harman (1979) warn about the limitations of academic researchers' contributions.

> Those of us who prepare studies about disadvantaged people run the risk of perpetuating stereotypes. We tend to simplify complex lives into cases to be analyzed, or problems that need solutions, or statistics to be studied. This tendency, and our inability to interpret with understanding the first-hand information that people give us about their aspirations and their lives are serious blind spots. (p. 55)

The reinforcement and perpetuation of stereotyped problems is a result of the distance of perspectives between research and researched. First-hand information about peoples' lives and aspirations should be generated and interpreted at the level of program and practice. If helping people and communities change and improve their lives is to be a goal of adult literacy and education programs, the information needs to be collected

and interpreted for their educational experience by the people together with concerned practitioners within the everyday world of their communities and programs.

Furthermore, if another goal of education is to change the social structures which are complicating and disempowering people's lives, information from many individual learner's personal circumstances needs to be documented and correlated with other adult learners in similar contexts. Then building up from the context of the everyday world where people live and deal with problems, the issues need to be framed in a way that will question and address social structures and societal powers that come to bear on the lives of real people. Traditional educational research and materials development takes the opposite approach by pulling the personal issues out of their context and allocating their solution to the expertise of professional categories: learning disabled, limited English proficient, homeless, displaced worker, etc.

Practitioners can easily be confused by the stereotypes and constrained by the categories perpetuated by the professional literature in adult literacy education. However, they are continually in the midst of the complexity of real people's lives. Even when committed to a particular curriculum or theory, they are forced to continually adapt it to help their students grapple with the material they are trying to learn. The practitioners engaged in inquiry and self-reflection has the potential to emerge from this contradiction or dissonance when they begin to actively trust their own ability to understand the situation, to listen to students, to create new materials, to involve the students in creating their own materials and giving expression to their own voice, to branch afield into topics of relevance to students, to discover and learn from the students'

own lives the basic material for an appropriate educational program. The purpose of this dissertation is to find out what can be learned through the process and information generated in a study circle support group that can make a difference in what practitioners are able to do with learners in their programs and communities.

Finally, in participatory research approaches, the subjects are seen as co-researchers and full participants in the research project. The study circle process and the knowledge created by the participants belonged to everyone in the group. For the purposes of my study, I have chosen to document and analyze certain aspects of that project. This individual use of a participatory project presents some research dilemmas. For example, it has long been the tradition in social science research to change the names of human subjects and organizations to protect the identity of the participants and to preserve the objectivity of the research. The Human Subjects Review form required by the School of Education was important, but seemed demeaning and inappropriate for the type of relationship I hoped to establish with the study circle. It did not make sense to treat participants as human subjects or disguise the name of a person who was describing a unique insight or practice they had learned about their experience. To do so would be to discredit their participation in the creation of new knowledge and to subsume it into my academic research.

In the process of composing a written consent form and discussing my research agenda with the members of The Literacy Project who participated in the study circle, I suggested that they be credited with their own words, particularly where they are making a significant contribution to the understanding of theory and practice to the field of

community-based literacy. In cases where a student's name was involved or where the reference to a particular town or community organization would be problematic, names would be changed or the reference altered to protect individuals not participating in the core study circle. In addition, in cases where I am quoting a section of dialogue where use of participants names may not be appropriate because I am analyzing a type of talk or process rather than specific content, we could use the option of using arbitrary initials to refer to speakers. In all cases, the participants in the study circle would have an opportunity to review the dissertation draft and participate in the decisions about how they, their students and their communities are referenced in the final manuscript.

Finally, the members of The Literacy Project acknowledged that they were proud of their program and eager to share their experience with other community-based literacy practitioners. Therefore, they wanted anyone who read this dissertation to be able to contact them directly and know them by name in order to follow-up and learn more about what TLP is currently doing. The Literacy Project Study Circle Support Group included the following people:

Phil Rabinowitz:	director
Alex Schroeder:	assistant director
Louise Barrows:	teacher (Greenfield Site)
David Henry:	teacher (Northampton Site)
Pat Larson:	teacher (Orange Site)
John Ewing:	teacher (Orange Site)
Judy Hofer:	teacher (Ware Site)
Michele Sedor:	teacher (Ware Site)
Joan Dixon:	facilitator/researcher
Sara DeTurk:	facilitator/researcher

The Study Circle Support Group as a Research Approach

While the study circle design was influenced by all of the research approaches described above, it was particularly influenced by participatory action research (PAR) and practitioner research. The Participatory Research Network (1982) identifies the following purposes for using participatory research.

> --promote the production of collective knowledge: the investigation and presentation of a social reality by the group(s) living it, with the sense of group ownership of the information;
>
> --promote collective analysis: the ordering of information in ways useful to the group in examining their reality;
>
> --promote critical analysis by groups and individuals: using the ordered information to determine the root causes of problems and issues apparent in the constituency, with a view to finding solutions to them;
>
> --promote the building of relationships between personal and structural problems as part of the collective problem solving process;
>
> --link reflection and evaluation with action, taking time to ask who, what, why, where, when? (1982, p. 5-6)

While most participatory action research projects are organized with grassroots level organizations and regular people from the community, as explained earlier, there is a growing rationale for using strategies derived from participatory research to develop the theory and skills of practitioners who work with community-based groups. Using methods and strategies from participatory research with people, such as literacy practitioners, who are employed in marginal areas of the existing socio-economic structure can contribute new viewpoints for social critique and action plans for social change.

Practitioner Research is gaining recognition in recent years as a strategy for teacher development and school reform. It is making significant inroads in staff development in adult literacy and is gaining popularity in Massachusetts. Susan Lytle and Marilyn Cochran-Smith (1993) have identified four types of teacher research. Type 1: Journals, Type 2: Oral Inquiries, Type 3: Classroom/School Studies, and Type 4: Essays. Initially, I had great hopes to organize a group of teacher researchers to engage in studies of adult literacy classrooms as part of my research project. However, given the time and money constraints inherent in the field of adult literacy, I found it easier and more logical to explore the possibilities of Oral Inquiry. Lytle and Cochran Smith emphasize that

> oral inquiry is not synonymous with teacher talk, just as teacher research is not synonymous with teacher writing. Rather, oral inquiry processes often follow specific theoretically grounded procedures and routines, require careful preparation and collection of data, and rely on careful documentation that enables teachers to revisit and reexamine their joint analyses. For teachers, oral inquiries provide access to a variety of perspectives for problem posing and solving. They also reveal the ways in which teachers relate particular cases to theories of practice. (1993. p. 30)

Study Circles then became the mechanism for setting up a structured approach to oral inquiry that would fit the needs and interests of community-based adult literacy practitioners. A study circle is a democratic approach to education where a group of peers learn about an issue together through discussion. The goal of the study circle is deeper understanding and deliberation that can lead to individual or group action on a social or political issue (Study Circles Resource Center, 1993).

In his book, The Politics of Education, Paulo Freire states that, "to study is not to consume ideas, but to create and re-create them" (1985, p.4). This statement summarizes what the word "study" means in the context of the group activity called a study circle. The purpose of a study circle is not to merely read and discuss books or articles with the idea of consuming information or broadening perspectives. The purpose is to seriously participate in studying, critiquing and understanding ideas in order to reinvent, re-create or rewrite them for application in one's own experience.

Freire further comments, "This critical attitude in studying is the same as that required in dealing with the world (that is, the real world and life in general), an attitude of inward questioning through which increasingly one begins to see the reasons behind facts" (p. 2). A study circle includes both the study of written texts and the study of real world literacy programs. "Studying is, above all, thinking about experience, and thinking about experience is the best way to think accurately" (p.3).

"Circle" is also an important aspect of study circles. It plays a role in the dynamics of the group discussion. Participants sit in a circle. The main role of the facilitator is to make sure that each person in the circle has a chance to speak and tell about what they have been reading, experiencing in the classroom or thinking about since the last session. The circle is democratic and encourages learning from peers. Sometimes discussions evolve informally, other times, the facilitator makes sure that each person has a chance to speak by going around the circle in order.

A support group is a group of peers engaged in similar activities who come together to discuss what they are doing and provide encouragement to each other as they

explore new possibilities for taking action to improve their work. When a group of practitioners come together in a study circle to discuss a topic of interest, they always bring along the concerns and problems encountered in their work experience. Rather than setting aside these concerns to focus on the topic of study, the group incorporates these issues into the discussion. Not only does looking at experience increase the "accuracy of thinking," it also provides an opportunity for group problem solving and support for practitioners who are working through difficult teaching and social change situations.

In reflecting on her observations of participants in one study circle we worked with, Lindy Whiton made the following discoveries about using time for problem solving with peers:

> The overworked traumatized teacher gets listened to in this [study circle] framework. The level of stress comes down and people both reflect and make predictions for the future. People's tones seem less frustrated or stressful. . . . I'm struck by the physical changes that happen to the participants as the two hours go by - they relax and they find their passions. I am also struck by the fact that they leave happy and with something new in their heads or on paper - that they seem so pro active. When I do other staff development, I'm usually aware if people were entertained - whether they understood, but I never feel as though I've relieved any tension for them. In the study circle I feel as though teacher tension is diminishing.

The combined activities of study and support create a situation where the participants not only deepen their understanding of community-based literacy work, but through sharing common problems and goals, they also strengthen their resolve to try new things, take new actions and make substantive changes.

With a small grant from the Study Circles Resource Center and supplementary funding from SABES, we designed and recruited participants for a five session study circle on the Social Context of Literacy. The study circle provided a time and place as well as a process for a group of literacy practitioners to talk about their theory and practice. However, the process that we developed together did not explicitly follow all of the principles and guidelines of participatory and practitioner research in a precise manner. Formative evaluation exercises incorporated into sessions 4, 7, 9 and 11 provided an opportunity for us to reflect on our process, decide how to organize additional sessions and then reflect on our new process. The findings and analysis in chapters V and VI will examine the study circle support group in detail to identify and describe the process, principles and practices which we developed. Chapter VII will then discuss the implications that the study circle has for staff and program development.

Research Design for Dissertation

As mentioned above, the purpose of the dissertation research is to document and analyze the study circle process in terms of insights gained from listening to what community-based practitioners talk about and how they articulate theory and practice in their own words in order to develop some guiding principles for designing staff development experiences and support for community-based literacy practitioners. In order to analyze and document the process that we created in our study circle support group, I designed the following methodology for data collection and analysis based on ideas and techniques drawn from the research approaches described in Section 1 above.

Data Collection

The description and analysis of the study circle is compiled from information generated in twelve study circle sessions held between January 1992 and May 1993 as well as follow-up interviews conducted with each participant in December 1993. Each study circle session was approximately 1-1/2 hours in length. Ten of the twelve sessions were tape recorded and transcribed. The first session's tape was not usable due to a problem with the recording equipment. Session 6 was not recorded because it was an informal session held at a cafe after the originally planned five sessions had been completed. Although this session was not taped, it played a significant role in recognizing the potential of using and organizing the study circle process in the future. This informal session was referred to several times in subsequent sessions as a sort of turning point for The Literacy Project's staff development process. Sessions 4, 7, 9 and 11 included formative evaluation discussions where the participants reflected on the process and their experience.

Analytic Framework

Transcriptions of the ten recorded sessions were analyzed using the time, talk, text and task framework developed by Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1993). I began by reading through each transcript and color coding references and allusions to time, talk, text and task. It soon became evident that talk and task could not be understood in terms of a single category. References to time and text on the other hand were easier to identify and were fairly easy to put into manageable categories for further analysis and discussion.

The sub-categories of references to time found in the transcripts included time issues for the study circle and time issues for the literacy programs. In both sub-categories, the issues related to timing, of how long it takes to accomplish things, were central concerns that are discussed in the findings of this study.

Time issues for the Study Circle

1. Time issues for study circle inquiry projects
2. Timing - when to name things (e.g. identify research as research, when to name or address a problem)
3. Facilitating the timing of the study circle
4. Defining how time should be used in the study circle
5. Time and staff/program development

Time Issues for the Literacy Programs

1. Stopping and starting class process
2. Things that have to be addressed continually (in class)
3. Time issues for making changes (in class, in the community)
4. Use of time in class
5. Time issues for learners in programs

The sub-categories identified for references to using and constructing texts found in the transcripts included the following:

1. Responses to assigned readings for the study circle
2. Responses to writing assignments for the study circle - keeping journals, logs, etc.
3. Input into choosing, defining, using texts in the study circle
4. References to additional reading materials
5. References to use of texts or writing in literacy classes
6. Using the study circle to document the literacy program

Again, the sub-categories of text were very straight forward and generally revolved around what we should be reading and writing in the study circle and why we found the use and construction of texts problematic.

Talk and task, on the other hand, did not prove to be manageable categories. On the surface, everything was both talk and task. The process used in the study circle was oral inquiry, i.e. talk, and the topic of our discussion was our task. I resolved the problem of understanding the category of talk by rereading the transcripts and trying to answer the question, "how are people using talk?" This analysis of the transcripts produced some intriguing insights into the study circle process. I identified the following kinds of talk that were being used by study circle participants.

1. Story Telling: Stories are the grist for the theory and practice building mill. Sometimes a person will tell a complete story or describe an experience in detail. More often, the story comes out through a variety of ways as the person participates in a discussion.

2. Hypothesis Formation: (Analyzed Observation) A person has been thinking about an experience, event or student behavior and trying to develop an hypothesis about the underlying issues and causes.

3. Self-Observation: A person has reflected on their practice enough to be able to describe to the group what they see themselves doing.

4. Problem Solving: A person is suggesting strategies to help someone solve an immediate problem.

5. Sharing and Analyzing Strategies: A person is identifying and articulating successful strategies for facilitating the learning process.

6. Meaning Making: Several people are contributing to an effort to articulate some sort of "theory" about what is going on in a particular situation.

7. Topic Discussion: This type includes discussion of reading assignments and evaluation of the study circle process.

In the subsequent analysis, I looked at the implications which each of these types of talk had for the process of articulating theory and practice in the study circle. I also analyzed how the different types of talking were intermingled to give many dimensions

to the description of a practice or an emerging theory about practice as well as how individual participants used each of the various types of talk in contributing to the discussion. Chapters V and VI go into more detail of how I analyzed these categories and developed connections between them and the task of the study circle.

Identifying a strategy to dissect and understand the task of the study circle also took several layers of analysis. The obvious task of the study circle was to discuss the topic, Social Context of Literacy. However, under this umbrella topic the discussion had ranged far and wide. Initially, I decided to simply go through the transcripts and identify the various topics that had come up in the discussion. This produced six themes which appeared as a main topic in at least one session and were also revisited in various other sessions and developed over the entire course of the study circle. It also produced two additional themes were beginning to emerge in the later sessions.

Themes covered under the task to study the Social Context of Literacy

1. The Literacy Project as a Social Context
2. Individual and Group Needs
3. Building Self-Confidence
4. Dealing with Expectations and the Unexpected
5. Starting New Things
6. Literacy in the Social Context
7. Transitions (emerging in later sessions)
8. Learner Networks (emerging in later sessions)

Although in and of themselves these themes provide interesting insights into how The Literacy Project defined its role as a community-based literacy program, they do not capture the essence of the task of the study circle. It was not until I came across Gaber-Katz and Watson's (1991) participatory study of community-based literacy that I found a

name for the task we were pursuing in the study circle: " It appears to us that the theory of community-based literacy is developed in tandem with, and emerging from the practice." With this concept that the task of the study circle was to provide a place for practitioners to articulate their theory and practice through reflection and discussion, I reanalyzed the themes together with the various types of talk and came up with a more coherent description of the task of the study circle.

Clearly since I discovered the idea of using the study circle to articulate theory and practice long after the original study circle design was conceived and initiated, this was not the original stated task of the study circle. My discussion and analysis of the task in Chapter V looks at how this task emerged over time through the process of talking together about real experience, ideas and efforts to develop participatory curriculum in a community-based literacy program.

Validation of Analysis

As mentioned before, the study circle design included periodic discussions where we reflected on our process. Therefore, the set of transcripts contains both explorations of the social context of literacy and self-analysis of our process. During the reflection sessions, I usually summarized my interpretations in written form in order to get feedback from the participants on the accuracy and relevance of my analysis. In session five, I gave the group a written summary of the initial five session study circle and led a discussion on how and why we had made changes. This session included some direct feedback about the use of texts and validated some of my interpretations of why we tended to prefer people's experience to information contained in the readings. In session

seven, we reflected on what we had learned from the previous six sessions and discussed possible choices for what we wanted to do next.

In session nine I gave everyone a set of themes I had identified with quotations from the previous discussions. This gave a people a chance to respond to my analysis of what was important in the discussions. It also gave them a chance to validate that I was recognizing themes that were important to them at this particular time as well as themes that had been part of The Literacy Project since its inception.

Prior to session eleven, I gave the group a draft report about the study circle which used the time, talk, text and task framework to analyze and describe the study circle. Included with the draft was a questionnaire asking participants to respond to my draft and express their own insights and concerns regarding each area of the framework. A copy of the questionnaire is in Appendix 1. Session eleven then included a discussion of the questionnaire and an in-depth reflection on the development and meaning of the study circle sessions.

In the follow-up interviews conducted in December 1993, I presented each participant with a summary of the themes and issues which they had brought to the study circle and talked with them about the impact which participating in the study circle had had on their practice and thinking during the preceding year. These interviews were tape-recorded and reviewed to analyze the impact of the study circle process. In addition, I have kept in contact with various participants through telephone and personal contact. Nearly every time we encounter each other we reflect on the impact of the study circle in terms of subsequent activities of the staff development process in The Literacy

Project. Finally, the draft manuscript of the dissertation was given to members of The Literacy Project for their comments, feedback and approval before the oral defense and finalization of the manuscript.

Despite the follow-up and verification process with participants in the study circle, it must be acknowledged that in organizing the extensive information from the transcripts for this case study, I have used my own interpretation for explaining and categorizing the various things which people said. To be sure if any one of the participants in the study circle were to take on the task of writing a description of the study circles or The Literacy Project from the exact same transcripts, they would create a very different document.

This difference in perception was acknowledged several times during the course of the study circle. For example, David observed in a mid-term evaluation that each person seemed to be using the study circle differently. Another time when I summarized the unrecorded session six held at a local cafe, Phil interrupted to see if anyone else who had been there knew what I was talking about. He went on to explain how he and Alex had been discussing the session earlier and realized they had each taken away different ideas. Finally, in session nine when I wrote up the brief description of themes I had found from analyzing the transcripts and gave it to the group for feed back, Louise made the following comment:

> Louise: (reading a statement made by Phil) "The history of the literacy project is not recorded except in people's heads and that is filtered through what my concerns are." I've thought about that, you know, that I've been around the project for a long time, but sometimes stuff that you recall, I

mean I remember it, and it all rings true, but I've got a totally different sort of slant on it. [7:1:109]

Throughout the process of recording, analyzing, synthesizing and interpreting the transcripts from the study circle, I have tried to get periodic feedback from the participants in an effort to capture some of the differences of perception and use of the study circle information. But in the end, the most I can probably hope for when the people at The Literacy Project read this case study is that they will say, "it all rings true, but it's obviously Joan's slant on it."

Presentation of the Case Study

In writing up the description of the study circle, I have been struck by the differences between oral and written language. The process of analyzing and creating categories to fit a particular type of written format transforms the information into something new. Qualitative researchers talk about "recontextualizing the data" (Dey, 1993). In the context of the study circle, we were a group of practitioners exchanging information, telling stories and making sense of the educational process at The Literacy Process. Each of the transcripts was like a snapshot of a particular point in time in a long river of evolving theory and practice. I have taken those transcripts and reorganized them into the new context of an academic research project.

Over the past two years as I have worked to make meaning from those frozen transcripts, the practitioners at The Literacy Project have continued talking, trying things out, strengthening their practice and refining their theories. Each time I meet one of them, they remind me of how they have changed. Things that were only seeds of ideas in

our discussions are now documented facts. Oral communication keeps up with the changing times. Written communication freezes time. At one point, I feared that my project would become so out of date that there was no sense in completing it. But then I realized by recontextualizing the information into an academic analysis, I was drawing out certain artifacts and processes for analysis that cannot be seen in the ever-changing oral "text." The composition of a written text makes visible underlying themes and processes that are only in the background of an oral conversation.

In writing up this case study, I have tried to give a sense of how the process of creating a study circle evolved as well as what the process of talking looked like. I have tried to use written constructs to describe an oral process in order to give more legitimacy to conversation and discussion as a form of practitioner research. Furthermore, I have deliberately chosen to include fairly extensive excerpts of dialogue in the presentation of the study circle because one of the key points I want to illustrate is that the way practitioners construct knowledge orally is very different from how I or other academic researchers would organize and summarize the information for a formal research study.

I found that when I extracted concepts from their context of stories, questions and discussion, I lost the full meaning. There were very few "quotable quotes" that made sense without the full conversation. Concepts and ideas were often introduced in half-articulated phrases and fleshed out in stories or insights that came many pages later in the transcripts. I think that understanding the way people construct knowledge through conversation is to identify the essence of oral inquiry. For this reason, I have included an

analysis of how the talk was constructed as well as sizeable excerpts that demonstrate the evolution of ideas. The more I worked with the information embedded in its context, the more I was persuaded to agree with Feldman that "some conversations are research" (1994, p. 12). At the time of the study circle, information was being generated, shared and utilized as part of an informal research process that was very different from the research process which I used to describe what was going on. Hopefully, the following presentation of the study circle findings will provide some insight into that oral inquiry research process.

CHAPTER V

THE LITERACY PROJECT TALKS ABOUT ITSELF: IDENTIFYING THE TASK

The purpose for analyzing the process of the study circle is to understand what can be learned from listening to literacy practitioners talk about their work that can inform those of us who are organizing staff and program development experiences for community-based literacy organizations. Rather than merely identifying topics and quoting what teachers say about their work, I wanted to examine what was going on in the study circle process on a deeper level. A framework developed by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) provided four perspectives on teacher researcher groups that can be used to help groups plan their collaboration. The four perspectives identify how practitioner researcher groups organize time, use talk, construct texts, and interpret the task of teaching and learning.

The framework, which they also call a "heuristic" meaning "serving to find out or discover," enabled me to dissect the process of the study circle from several different perspectives to identify the underlying dynamics of our discussion. Therefore, I have chosen to organize this analysis into four sections based on their heuristic of Task, Talk, Time and Text.

In the first section I will discuss how our task evolved from the stated objective to discuss the "social context of literacy" to a more organic exploration of the theory and practice of The Literacy Project as they moved from a learner-centered, individualized curriculum to a group-based curriculum increasingly involved in community-based

activities. In the second section I will discuss the talk of the study circle through identifying and analyzing different types of talk that ranged from story-telling to problem solving to meaning making. I will explore how the informal conversational discussion of the study circle facilitated the process of building the theory and practice of The Literacy Project. In the third section, I will briefly discuss our experience using texts and how we finally came to use our own stories as the basic text for learning. Finally in the fourth section, I will discuss the multi-faceted issues of time and their various implications for literacy learning as well as for staff development for literacy educators. Before getting into an in-depth analysis, I will provide some background information about The Literacy Project and the design of the study circle support group.

Background Information

The Literacy Project is a community-based organization which provides reading, writing, math and GED instruction to adult learners. It is located in four communities in western Massachusetts and serves over 300 adults each year. According to its brochure,

> The mission of the Literacy Project is to help individuals and groups toward personal and community development through literacy training.
>
> The Literacy Project is committed to the use of a whole language approach and to students' control of their learning.
>
> The organization constantly strives to improve instruction in reading, writing and math and to encourage their use.
>
> Both the classroom and the organization aim to apply these principles in a supportive community environment of mutual respect. (TLP Brochure)

The Literacy Project was established in 1984. Since its inception, they have practiced a regular pattern of weekly meetings with the whole staff alternating staff

meetings on alternate weeks with staff development meetings. This practice of regular staff development meetings has had a major influence on the evolving theory, practice and program development during the past ten years. Over the years, the Department of Education and other Literacy Programs have gone from viewing TLP's whole language methods with suspicion and skepticism to respecting their program and even trying to find out their secret for success.

As a community-based organization, TLP has a vision of its purpose that guides program development decisions. In the midst of a funding environment where donors and policy-makers are continually changing the focus and sources of funding for literacy education, ranging from GED to displaced home-makers, welfare mothers, family literacy, etc., they have tried to be guided by the needs and interests of the people who came voluntarily through their door. As with all community-based literacy programs, funding has had to be patchworked together from multiple sources, but The Literacy Project had made conscious decisions to seek out funding sources that are in keeping with its community-based philosophy and are supportive of the learners and communities they serve.

The staff, both teachers and administrators, expressed interest to participate in the Study Circle on the Social Context of Literacy, which we organized and advertised through the SABES Western Regional Center. They were interested in the topic because it was relevant to their philosophy and practice, and requested that the sessions be held during their regular staff development time so that everyone could attend. Initially an effort was made to include practitioners from other programs in the area. However, the

timing was difficult, so it ended up being a single program-based endeavor. A second group was organized in the south end of the county comprised of practitioners from several different programs. SABES and the Literacy Support Initiative at UMass had collaborated to get a grant from the Study Circles Resource Center to fund the curriculum development for two five-session study circles. After the initial funded sessions ended, we elected to continue independently for an additional seven sessions.

Task of the Study Circle

The original study circle curriculum outlined five structured sessions to explore the topic of the "social context of literacy." Session 1 introduced the topic of social context and the concept of teacher research. Sessions 2 - 5 were all based on the idea of "learning from the social context:" with sessions 2 and 3 focused on "applications and implications for improving our teaching," session 4 focused on "the world of our students and its influence on our classroom," and session 5 focused on "the world of adult basic education and its influence on our classroom." (See Appendix 2 for the complete syllabus.) Each session included sharing, discussion, analytic activities, applications and reading assignments. Participants were to keep observation logs and journals. The syllabus was clear and well organized to provide an interesting exploration of the social context of literacy.

However, starting with session 2, the group began to depart from the written syllabus. The sharing of experiences and observations provided such rich materials for discussion that the planned activities seemed simplistic or tangential. While most participants eventually read a fair portion of the assigned readings, they found it difficult

to fit the reading into their busy schedules. Furthermore, the planned sequence of information coming from the articles seldom corresponded to the spontaneous information coming from the shared experiences of the participants. And finally, even though the five sessions were spaced two to three weeks apart, the expectation in the syllabus of what could be collected from or applied to the classroom had no correlation to what participants could actually implement in real life.

In spite of the fact that the group was not following the planned sessions, something interesting was happening in the discussions and the group elected to continue with the study circle after five sessions. The group discussed possible options for organizing the next series of sessions, but again fell into the same pattern of sharing information and letting the conversation take it's own course. However by this time, there was a certain amount of consensus to just go with the flow.

From the beginning, I had been concerned that the study circle process should somehow interconnect with the practitioners existing "job description" rather than be a set of assignments imposed on top of an already heavy load. When I realized that my facilitator efforts to structure a learning agenda did not correspond to the rhythm and timing of the learning process that was going on in day to day practice at the sites, I turned to my research mode and focused on what could be learned about practitioners and practice from listening to the natural flow of conversation.

In designing a summary of the study circle process for feedback from the group in Session 11, I introduced the idea of a "written syllabus" and a "lived syllabus" to differentiate between the topic and task-based agenda we had originally planned and the -

conversation-based process we ultimately pursued. One participant (Judy) commented, "One thing that I really enjoyed was how you made a distinction between a written syllabus and a lived syllabus. And I like that you called both of them a syllabus. It really legitimized the living one, the experiential one. Anyway, that was just one thing I highlighted. Because I think that was often less legitimate" [9:1:028].

In educational research and practice, we are often so focused on the objectives and outcomes of preplanned tasks, that we fail to take note of all the other types of learning that are going on outside the narrow plan. Judy and the group appreciated the fact that I legitimized what was learned from conversations that diverted from the planned agenda, because it also legitimized what was happening in their own experiences in class and the office. Another time, when we were discussing the importance of conversations that wander, Phil commented how helpful that was, because often he and Alex would end a long and interesting discussion that wandered off the topic of administrative matters by negating its value with the disclaimer, "well we've got to stop wasting time and get back to work."

My focus in analyzing the task of the study circle was to explore the process-based task or lived syllabus, that emerged from the group in the form of an on-going "long and serious conversation" to borrow Feldman's term (1994). The purpose of my analysis will be to legitimize what was learned from the conversations of the "lived syllabus" by contrasting it with the preplanned topic-based task of the written syllabus and documenting some of the insights which came from following the emerging curriculum. This section is divided into three parts. Part one looks at the stated task of

the original study circle, "exploring and defining the social context of literacy," and how it started as a topic in the written syllabus and evolved into something else over ten sessions documented in the lived syllabus' transcripts. Part two includes an extensive exploration of themes which emerged from the lived syllabus and which I believe form the true task of the study circle: "creating and articulating the theory and practice of The Literacy Project." Part three looks at what the participants understood to be the study circle process in terms of assignments, activities and discussions. It also documents feedback and decisions made during formative evaluation sessions.

Exploring and Defining the Social Context of Literacy (The Stated Task)

Over the life of the study circle, the discussion moved from referring to social context as an abstract topic to exploring The Literacy Project both as a social context in itself and as an organization doing literacy <u>in</u> the social context of the communities where each of the four sites were located. I see this transition as the movement by the group from talking about an assigned topic in a written syllabus to participating in a lived syllabus where the discussions revolved around everyone's roles in and around and through the social context of the literacy worlds they worked in. While there was some frustration among group members that we never achieved an explicitly stated working definition of the social context (one of the goals of the written syllabus) there was also an acknowledgement that other kinds of implicit insights into social context emerged in the context of stories, metaphors and attempts to analyze human behavior through the lived syllabus..

An example of how the group discussed the social context of literacy as a topic comes from the first session where the group brainstormed the following list of things that would be in a program's social context. The list gives a sense of the widely ranging assumptions that people brought to the early discussions of social context.

-program in larger community
-each town has similarities, differences
-economic background
-race, class, gender, ethnicity
-emotional state
-people in immediate circle (family)
-United States, the whole economy
-government influences program's funding and lives of students
-global politics, economy, etc.
-individualistic ideology (pull up by own bootstraps)
-news media, TV, information society
-U.S. ideology (ideal vs felt reality)
-program ideology
-state and local government
-particular ideology at certain point in time
-agency ideology
-teacher and students ideology
-social context includes history
-transportation, lack of day care, materials, time
-family, health, religion
-natural environment
-communication ability, inability

Comparing this list with themes and issues that were actually discussed in the subsequent study circle sessions, I found that the only topics on this list that played a major role were program ideology, and teacher and student ideology. My initial feeling was that these two topics shouldn't even be classified as social context because they are internal. However, as I shall explain in more detail later, the perception of one's role in

relation to the social context turned out to be more important to literacy practice than one's ability to define and list the components of social context.

In addition to this list, the group also generated a set of concentric circles to show how the social context of the class is embedded in the program, the town, the state, the U.S. and global issues. The abstract topics on the list and the generic layers of concentric social contexts moved beyond an academic discussion in later sessions and became more meaningful as the group members personalized them in terms of their own beliefs and experience. "Class" became the unique social context that each of the teachers was trying to create for a particular group of students. "Program" became The Literacy Project at a specific point in time. "Town" became the selectmen's meeting or the library board in a specific town. "State" became real people from the Bureau of Adult Education with a particular request. "U.S." became the welfare office when a particular group of students needed specific information. We discovered that social context has to be defined in specific terms and when you try to generalize it, "well" (as one participant put it) "it's everything." It seems that social context itself can only be defined in context with real examples and real stories.

In sifting through the references to social context in the transcripts, a number of intriguing insights came up as people described their work in relation to the social context. First of all, the metaphors to explain everyone's feelings about social context revealed the ever-growing complexity of the task we had taken on. Three of the four metaphors used to articulate ideas about social context used the imagery of layers -

onions, nested wooden dolls and wheels within wheels. The other metaphor was a garden.

1. Alex: I feel like those little wooden dolls you get from Norway or something, that we're going to keep opening and find, oh yes, one more social context. [1:2:186]

2. Alex: And you can't even just step in and ask them (learners), "what literacy activities or practices do you do outside?" You have to like bring them back, . . . get outside and re-examine what you define as a literacy practice. The unpeeling, going backwards in onion layers of social context. [1:2:113]

3. Pat: Cause I think there are all these layers. I mean if we talk about social context in the classroom . . . then there's all the other. So how do you get sort of a definition of social context? [1:2:034]

4. Phil: Well and you've got wheels within wheels. Because like the local history thing,. . . . what you get is uses of literacy in a number of different ways and connections to the community in a number of different ways, and people sort of recapitulating what they've been through, from the other side. Just lots of wheels.[7:1:292]

5. John: You really have to see each site. Maybe this is a weird analogy, but it's almost like explaining vegetable gardening to someone - you've got different conditions, soil and weather, different plants, different tastes. Each site is like a real different environment. And to explain vegetable gardening in New England to someone in New Mexico, you would have to go there to tell them, find out what they eat. So I think that would be a requirement, that people really see the environment first before we start to explain it. [5:1:500]

The group never seemed to come to a satisfactory working definition of social context. At every formative evaluation, someone would ask for a definition. Even in the 11th session, some people still expressed frustration at not being able to explain social context to someone else while others felt that we had in fact deepened our understanding of the concept at least within the very specific context of The Literacy Project. Phil offered an intriguing insight into the process: "I think what we've actually been doing in

the process has a lot to do with the social context of the classroom, but has more to do with the social context of this group. I think we have been refining and redefining, you know, what we're about." [9:1:295]

In fact a review of what people said about social context bears out Phil's suggestion. Participants in the study circle were defining their role in, their relationship to, their perception of, and their participation in the construction of the social context of their literacy work. This recognition of being embedded in as well as participating in the construction of the social context is a key defining factor of what makes The Literacy Project a truly community-based literacy program. They do not teach literacy as isolated reading and writing skills. They do not merely prepare people to pass GED tests. They design all aspects of the program in terms of what they are learning from the social context of the students, the communities and the program; and they see themselves as actively seeking to work with students to change the social context of the communities.

Once we recognize that the transcripts are not a discussion of a topic called the social context of literacy, we have to use a different framework for understanding what people are saying and alluding to in reference to social context. In a sense the comments made by the teachers and staff of TLP are like a fish describing water. When I proposed to the group that we didn't really need a definition of social context because we were using it as a way of looking at and describing things and everything seemed to be related to social context, Phil replied that he thought everything always has been related to social context in the program: "Social context is the way I think about things" [3:1:145]. At another time, a comment by Pat revealed that a sense of the social context was embedded

in her way of going about her work: " Today I have a new thing that I'm trying to deal with the social context of. I guess I see it as all part of an organic mass. It's sort of O.K. for me. It's sort of my personal way of operating" [4:1:565].

As I reviewed the transcripts, I realized that this embeddedness in the social context was the basic theoretical construct beneath the theory and practice of The Literacy Project. The study circle was in one sense a tour of the TLP garden with the corresponding discussion of how the current weather and soil conditions of each site were interacting with the growing and changing plants (people and programs). In the process of the study circle tour, we were figuring out how to articulate the complex intertwining of theory and practice at TLP. It is very informative to look at some of the phrases used by members of the study circle in connection with social context.

The Social Context Builds and Grows

The social context of a classroom is an outgrowth of what the teacher and all the students bring to the learning experience.

> Pat: As we look at, say, our classroom and what we do, certainly a certain social context builds and grows. Then as sort of new people come in or something, they're bringing whatever social context they're from. I mean that's like that whole thing about assumptions about what school is.
> Phil: Sure and those things get mixed. Which broadens the perspective, but also occasionally makes for really volatile compounds. [1:2:058]

The social context is not a static backdrop, nor even an established place. Every new person who comes into the program brings whatever social context they're from.

The Social Context is Portable

You carry the influence and memories from your past social context with you and it can influence your perception of your current social context. In the initial discussion, I felt like the group was confusing social context with individual assumptions. However, it soon became clear that the two were definitely intertwined. Students came to The Literacy Project with fixed assumptions about education based on past school experience. From these discussions emerged the idea that social context is not only something that surrounds an individual, but it is also something that can be carried with them into a new context.

The initial "theory" of a portable social context was described in an extensive discussion about how two people can have the same experience (going to a play or movie) and come away with entirely different interpretations because of their past socialization and the social context they grew up in. This basic concept of individuals carrying their social context with them presented a number of interesting implications for classroom practice.

1. Pat: They come in with those preconceived notions and it takes a long time to sort of have them, say, look there are other possibilities. So even though we may believe, and we may have other students that have come to believe that it should be a different way or it can be a different way. That's not necessarily [the case] when people walk in, that's not part of their context. [1:2:034]

2. Judy: In the creative writing class, I mean I can teach truly how I believe I would like to teach. In the GED class, I can't. You know, it becomes a different context and I have to take on a different role - there is a right answer. Phil: And that's what Sara was just saying. That in the one case you're, well in all cases, you're bringing a context with you that says to you that certain things should be done in certain ways. You know in the other case that context is interacting with the context that each student brings. So that there's that whole

question of whether you can have a class that meets the needs of everybody in the class. [1:2:197]

There are Public and Private Aspects of Social Context

Depending on whether you are looking at the social context from a group or individual perspective, the boundaries and components of the social context can vary.

1. Alex: I had some trouble thinking about what social context meant after having left. I mean it was clear to me when I was here last time. . . . I was trying to get at boundary between what I had determined to be my social context and how that bumps up against what the group's social context is. [1:1:003]

2. David: The one question that's really been most important: this whole variety of ways you can think about social context, but to just sort of make a rough generalization about it, I can say the social context is in a classroom of people it is, you can think of the context of something that is beyond the classroom itself or you can think of it as the inner world each of the students - something public or private, maybe, is a way to talk about it. To me that is something that needs to be balanced in the end. But I had been thinking a lot about it, listening to a lot of the things that Pat and John have been involved in Orange, I have been assuming that the public context was the most desirable one to open up in a classroom. I still kind of feel that way. You have raised the question that the private worlds of students - we need to be in touch with that. I think there is something to that. [3:1:247]

You Can Create the Social Context in Your Class or Program

In earlier sessions, we tended to look at social context as something surrounding each individual student who came to a class. However, from the idea of negotiating between all the expectations, more and more attention was paid to the group experience and the realization that the group is creating a new social context. This in turn opens up the fact that teachers and administrators can employ a number of different strategies to create a social context for learning in each class as well as in a program as a whole.

Alex: I'm struck by the social context stuff we did when we started with Joan and Sara way back and we did that whole sheet up here and everybody drew a picture and what we focused on almost exclusively, unless maybe I'm mistaken, was the individual factor stuff - the town or the job or the religion or the sort of values that individuals bring and we never really spent a lot of time on what then happened within the group. The big group itself gets those things and the group itself becomes a sub-context and that what's playing out in what everybody's saying is that the shift from people having (and this is sort of a gross overgeneralization) but sort of having one dimension and suddenly they've added this group dimension, and now they're having to sort out a balancing act between themselves, the group and this outside you know, family life, values, religion and so forth and that this whole idea of the group over time and what is the role of the group and the process that the individual wants and stuff like that. And everybody here has talked about the same dynamic and Judy mentioned making that stuff explicit and saying what has happened here, we've all been individuals, but now there's this connection - how do we explain that? [5:2:247]

One of the issues that David was interested in was understanding the needs of each person in his class. As he changed from an individualized learner-centered approach to a group approach, he prepared strategies to build a group context that would support individuals.

David: But I think it may have to do with this question of social context or at least, you know, who are, you know, "what do the students in the group share in common and what is different in terms of who they are or where they're from? What do they identify as their social context or their personal context or anything?" But I think that a lot of that stuff can happen in the beginning of a class where people introduce each other, you know, say whatever it is about themselves. And what it is that's the same or different about them and everybody else. I mean I still haven't structured the activity yet. But at least around the question of establishing some sort of common ground among the people in the class. You know what is common and what is not common. What people say building a community in the classroom. I just want to make sure that that happens so that we establish for ourselves a kind of social context, you know a kind of social context for ourselves. I don't know what that will be, but I just sort of want to make sure that that happens. [1:2:273]

When the group context started to overwhelm the individual contexts, David sought a way to bring balance between the two back into the classroom.

> David: You know when you put people in a group, you start to have that whole, I think what we've been talking about, you have the social context of what are the issues of the day in Northampton. Well then they become what are the issues of the day in the classroom. They're going back and forth. Some people care and some people don't care. So, you have to deal with that and still try to keep an eye on everybody's individual needs in a way. Make sure that people have a chance to express their opinion and not just stay in the corner and say I don't care about this, I don't care about this. [5:1:632]

Related to the fact that they saw the social context as something fluid and dynamic, the members of the study circle also recognized that they could actively change, influence and create aspects of their external social context. They applied this belief to the structuring of the program and classes, to the curriculum and to their work in the community.

> Phil: Social context is the way I think about things. If you know the Literacy Project, that's certainly obvious. Making me really look at the fact that we as an organization have a very specific social context - we instruct and we try to fit people into that with some thought about what their social context is. I'm not sure that we pay enough attention to that. Enough attention to what exactly our's is in terms of really defining it and (a) whether it's appropriate to try to fit other people into that. We think it is. (b) If it is appropriate, how do you do that in a way that makes people feel better about themselves rather than worse about themselves. [3:1:145]

<u>It is Possible to Change the Social Context</u>

The staff members of The Literacy Project were not interested in the social context merely for the purpose of making their curriculum more interesting and relevant. They were seriously interested in promoting a social change perspective in the program

and among the students. They felt a key component in "empowering" learners to change their personal situation or to organize to change things in their community or the larger society, was to understand that they helped create the social context they lived in and therefore, they had power to change it. By involving students in creating the context of the program and classrooms of The Literacy Project, they helped them learn skills which could be used in other contexts.

In facilitating one of the early sessions, Sara pointed out that there are environmental "impacts on learning, but there are also impacts on how you teach, and sometimes that's a function of how you think people are going to learn and sometimes that's a function of who you are and what your social context is." [1:2:197] The perception that TLP staff had about their relation to the social context as an active change agent and participant had an important influence on what they chose to do in both the classroom and the community.

> Phil: [Social context] always has been in this program. It's always been out front to a very large extent. That we've always talked about, essentially changing people's perception of the social context and helping them realize that they could influence that context. [7:1:229+]

Literacy in the Social Context

Over the course of the year when we were meeting in the study circle, the staff and teachers were becoming more skilled and more active in working with students in their community. The study circle became a place to share ideas and to describe their struggles to bridge learning in the classroom to learning in the outside community. Phil expressed it in terms of turning a corner.

1. Phil: Clearly we have turned a corner somewhere as a program in that we are doing, it seems to me that we are doing more than just kind of creating an environment encouraging people. What we're doing is providing stepping stones for people to get into other kinds of activity whether it's introspective or political. . . . I think that we've always said that the Literacy Project is a whole service. That we do whole language, whole life, whole people. . . . But what I'm saying is that we've always said that, but now we're doing it more and more. And I think we will do it more and more. That our definition of literacy has expanded or maybe not even expanded, but our ideas of how to do it have expanded to the point where it's become much more of a practical issue in a lot ways and we're doing a lot more experiential teaching and experiential learning. [6:2:287]

2. Joan: In a sense, when we first started this thing [Social Context of Literacy], we were talking in terms of what's the social context there and how do you bring it into the classroom. But this idea of stepping stones into the community is like doing literacy in the social context. . . . maybe that's the two pieces you were talking about earlier. That there's a place within the walls of the Literacy Project where people can do that personal reflection and getting in touch there. But then there's also those stepping stones out to the outside community where you're willing to go along or help mediate things. You're actually going out into the social context where the political change occurs, community development. [6:2:326]

3. David: I was going to say that I think that the program has been in the midst of a transformation. I mean when you came in it had sort of been happening around expanding the social context of the classroom. I think one of the dimensions that we talked about was you know the classroom itself and the people having all their own worlds and I think the program has been transforming in that way as you come in. And I think what's happening now is that sort of the classrooms themselves have, the social context has been expanded and the students are more connected with each other and each individual classroom. I think. And this sort of next steps move now which I think we're all starting to, at least I am also starting to rev up a little bit about. And I think Orange has a lot and I think from things I hear you guys saying, you're starting to rev up around that too. In other words, you've got a written syllabus which says you have to get a GED. But then there's a lived syllabus which says your GED cannot be the last thing that we talk about here. So, I mean, that is more like the social context widening to what you know, what opportunities really are out there once you've read all the books that are here. You know, or whatever. So I think that it's given us a chance to reflect as we've always been saying. And also to validate that, you know, what we're doing in the classroom doesn't have wires around it. [9:1:261]

Hanna Fingeret has summarized the social context of literacy in the most succinct definition I have found since the conclusion of the study circle. Her definition encapsules many of the issues which the study circle participants explored in the form of stories, anecdotes, questions, problem posing and problem solving and analogies.

> The social context of literacy is the set of social attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and values within which adults with low literacy skills develop their self-concept and sense of self-esteem. The social context of literacy also is the immediate environment within which adults use their literacy skills. The ability of adults with low literacy skills to navigate their environment reflects their courage, intelligence and persistence in the face of great odds. (Royce, 1991, p. 49)

The major difference, from a staff development perspective, between presenting Fingeret's definition in a workshop and leading discussion on the social context of literacy, and wandering through many conversations in and around and through the concept in a study circle process, is that the participants in the study circle are able to locate themselves and define their role as educators in the specific social context they were describing.

The discussion of the topic, social context of literacy, gave way to an exploration of TLP's own process for doing literacy in the social context. In this transition, the task of the study circle evolved from exploring an abstract topic to exploring and articulating the theory and practice of The Literacy Project. The next part of this section will look in more detail at some of the ways the study circle group named and described the various themes and components involved in doing literacy in the social context.

Creating and Articulating Theory and Practice
(The Discovered Task)

The task which emerged from the lived syllabus of the study circle support group was the creation and articulation of the theory and practice of The Literacy Project. I chose to call this the discovered task, because I did not find a fitting description for what we were doing until after the study circle ended. In reading Gaber-Katz and Watson's book, the land that we dream of . . . a participatory study of community-based literacy, I came across the statement, "It appears to us that the theory of community-based literacy is developed in tandem with, and emerging from, the practice" (1991, p.2). I instantly drew a connection with what we had been doing all year in the study circle support group. The participants were not merely talking about their work under the umbrella topic, social context of literacy, they were working out complex issues and problems related to the theory and practice of their daily work. They were also articulating the processes they were going through as they carried their program through a transition from individual, learner-centered approaches to group-based and community out-reach approaches.

Phil probably came the closest to naming our task at the midway point of the study circle.

> Phil: And the thing is you can't codify everything. Teaching is an art, not a science. I really believe that. You can't say this is how you do it, because there isn't a how you do it. But there are certain quid pro quos, there are certain things that you have to have in order to make things work and there are certain basic assumptions that you have to start with. The question is how does that play out for us. . . . People want to know what we're doing and by that they mean all of these technical, and that's not really the issue. The issue has to do with how we approach what we're

doing more than anything else I think. To some extent it's a function of certain philosophical things, obviously there's a philosophical base, we're talking about whole language and all of those things that influence how that happens. But clearly, it can happen in different ways. And what's important is the basic approach which is who we are, not what we do, I think. When I say who we are, I don't mean only who we are as individuals, but who we are as an organization. [5:1:220 & 281]

Looking back over transcripts to identify the quid pro quos and assumptions revealed another comment by Phil that indicates a shared commitment to working together and helping each other grow as well as an openness to achieving that commitment through a variety of approaches.

Phil: Not only each of us as individuals, but as an organization, we tend to have a lot of different foci, a lot of different ways of trying to pull things together. And there's a sort of over-riding something that holds it all together and I'm not exactly sure what it is. Seriously, I think it has to do with philosophy and some other ways of looking at people, not so much education as human relations. But I think that in practice, we tend to do a lot of bouncing. That is reflective in a lot of ways in what we did here. [4:1:590]

The range of topics covered in the study circle transcripts is evidence of the fact that TLP tends to bounce between many interests and issues. It is no small challenge to pull together and organize everything. However, as I have tried to assemble the various pieces of the over-riding philosophy of the program from things people said in the study circle, I think Phil's analysis is correct. The binding philosophy that holds all the parts of The Literacy Project together is a way of looking at people and human relations. But that binding philosophy leaves plenty of space for everyone from experienced staff to new learners to join in the process defining and developing the educational process at the program sites. It also allowed flexibility to respond to the changing social context.

Adams (1975) called it "vagueness" in his description of Highlander's strategies and principles for action.

In many ways, our study circle discussion process was an ideal way to articulate and document the evolving theory and practice of The Literacy Project. The free-flowing, meandering discussion allowed for a wide ranging exploration of the varied activities and philosophical beliefs that made up the entity called The Literacy Project. The conversations recorded in the study circle transcripts include the voices of all the players. While there is unity of purpose, there is also diversity in interpretation and approach.

In the process of the flowing discussion, a number of themes emerged that I pulled out, named and shared with the study circle participants as part of my effort to organize and document how TLP was seen from the inside. Each of these themes represent an area of practice which the study circle members were attempting to understand and describe in order to improve their program. I was interested to note in choosing words and phrases to express the themes, that I was searching for ways to express relationships, dynamic tensions and change. I also discovered that it was in the dynamic relations of these thematic constructs that the theories of TLP were emerging and the curriculum was being developed.

I have chosen to discuss six themes which I identified in the transcripts. Most of them were recognized by the study circle members, when I showed them a draft outline, as issues which had been continually discussed over the years since TLP was first organized.

> Phil: I think actually it's a real good summary, not only of where we've been, but where we are. We bounce around these themes constantly. These are the themes. You know they really are, very much. There are others also which you may not have touched on in the actual study circle. But I mean these are sort of basic themes that we keep coming back to. [7:1:336]

This summary and analysis of the themes will hopefully shed light not only on what or who The Literacy Project is, but also identify key issues which may have relevance for defining the criteria for understanding what it means to be a community-based literacy program, as well as what it means to engage in developing your own theory and practice. Theories don't come forth as clear-cut generalizable statements of truth. In the study circle conversations, it is evident that theories start as hunches, questions, stories and guesses. Developing the ability to articulate and act upon one's theory and practice is an on-going process which Alex described in the following way.

> Alex: I can't think of a good analogy. But, it's some of the ideas that come up have come up before, but every time they come up, they get chiseled a little better or something happens to them. And the next time it comes up, it will have benefitted from all those times that it surfaced. And I think that this process has really added or really refined those ideas and made the likelihood of their happening, despite energy and finances and stuff, much greater. And also, not only just sort of the idea and its life of itself, but also how it connects to what we are doing and what each of us brings to that project or idea which sort of helps to insure if it does come about or when it does come about that it's more likely to succeed. [9:1:334]

The study circle provided an explicit time and place for this on-going process of articulating theory and practice to occur.

As I explained in the Methodology Chapter, these themes were drawn from careful analysis of the study circle transcripts. I have chosen to present each theme in a

format which most clearly presents the key issues. This format is not necessarily in chronological order. In some cases, the name or best description of the theme came in later sessions which enabled me to look back and recategorize things which had not fit together previously. In other cases, the theme was named at the outset and we were consciously aware of what we were talking about. In reality most of the themes were covered in nearly all of the sessions to some extent. Furthermore, many stories and corresponding discussions covered more than one theme.

I have selected the names of the themes and made the decisions about which conversations and stories are representative. Others in the study circle may have organized them differently. Clearly, we were conscious that we were all using the information from the discussions for our own purposes. To the best of my ability and time constraints, I have tried to get feed back along the way and for the final draft of this section to insure that my description of these themes rings true for the people who are the staff and teachers of The Literacy Project.

I have chosen to present these themes in a manner which will be helpful to others who are trying to figure out how a community-based literacy program operates within a particular social context. The various themes indicate what community-based practitioners, at least at TLP, pay close attention to as they are developing curriculum together with their students. The range of themes nicely illustrates the wide reaching way that the staff and teachers of The Literacy Project are defining literacy. These themes are not presented as topics for staff development workshops. The knowledge they contain is not easily organized and packaged. They are explorations of contexts and

issues encountered in reflecting on interactions and dialogue with learners and the social context of the program.

Even though we did not get around to naming and discussing The Literacy Project as a social context until we were well into the study circle process, I have chosen to present this theme first because it gives an overview of some of the major concerns of TLP from the viewpoint of the people who work there. Following this first theme, TLP as a Social Context, we will then look at four themes which entered the conversation of the study circle because they were a major concern for the day-to-day practice at TLP sites during the transitional time period when the study circle was conducted: Theme 2) Individual vs Group Need, Theme 3) Building Self-Confidence, Theme 4) Dealing with Expectations and the Unexpected, and Theme 5) Starting New Things. Finally, Theme 6) Literacy in the Social Context summarizes what we discovered to be the true topic of our study circle.

Theme 1: TLP as a Social Context

At The Literacy Project the whole program, from the furniture to the philosophy, is part of the curriculum and the only way to understand that is to pay attention to how the staff talk about what they are trying to create and develop at each site. In the course of the study circle, they identified and articulated a number of things they were trying to do to create positive conditions for learning in the program. The study circle helped us articulate the fact that The Literacy Project itself was a social context which they and the students had power to create and change.

Regular Staff Development and Staff Meetings. From its inception, one of the key elements that set TLP apart from other literacy programs was the fact that they met regularly as a staff. In a field where the majority of teachers work part time and rarely see their co-workers in the same program, The Literacy Project set up a system of weekly meetings - holding staff development sessions on alternate weeks with staff meetings. It was very simple to introduce the innovation of a study circle because we were able to meet during the regular staff development times. Over the years staff development and staff meetings provided an opportunity to work together to create the program, learn new skills and develop a common philosophy.

Because we held the study circle during regular staff development time, there was quite a bit of overlap with regular staff meetings. In fact, when Michele was hired and joined the study circle during its second phase, she didn't realize that we had a special focus. She just assumed I was taping and facilitating regular meetings. But the study circle approach also introduced a new way of interacting at staff meetings which seemed compatible with where TLP was in its programmatic evolution. The discussion in the study circle gave people a chance to describe their personal theories and the activities at their individual sites in quite a bit of detail. Through this process, they developed a stronger shared understanding of what theoretical and philosophical beliefs they had in common. At the same time, they realized that each of the sites had its own unique personality and ways of doing things.

As programs came up with and shared their innovative ideas, other sites wanted to experiment also. The study circle provided a place for Alex, the assistant director and

program developer, to hear the teacher's perspectives and see the big picture for fund raising strategies. In follow-up conversations, she commented that because the study circle facilitated sharing ideas and information on how teachers were developing program initiatives at their sites, she felt the teachers were coming to her with more interest in participating in proposal development.

Physical Space as Part of the Learning Context. Physical space is such an obvious component of any social context that it is often overlooked. Yet at The Literacy Project, the use of physical space is a conscious part of the program. Teachers and staff think about the configuration of chairs, the shape of tables, whether the classrooms and informal spaces are welcoming and conducive to positive social interaction. Furthermore, students take an active role in structuring the space and feel an ownership for the place where they study. It is interesting to note how often the physical space was discussed at various times throughout the study circle. The references to physical space reveal how broadly the staff and teachers at TLP view the process of literacy instruction in their program, as the following examples illustrate.

First of all, it was important that the program sites had a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere and that the students felt like it was their place. This was accomplished through inviting students to help donate and build furniture and other items. The following excerpt describes David's efforts to get a new site set up.

> David: Things are good at the new site. We've been there three weeks now, three weeks and a day. And we didn't have any furniture or anything when we started out. We just had books and the bookshelves. It was already there. The bookshelf was built in. And we've had this great influx of things. Well, not a great influx. We've had an initial influx so that

> we're now. We can function like this. I mean we have tables, we have chairs, and couches. There was a sink in there. I have a desk, I have a file cabinet. We have waste baskets. And there's more that could come out there. I think now we've got a, well some students want to build some bookshelves so we can. I mean we're at a point now where we're totally functional, sort of. And it's been a lot of fun. Students have brought in. It's all been supplied on a volunteer basis by students and volunteers. And it's been exciting. I think now we're at a point where we can keep developing the site. But we don't have to. We could just sit there the rest of the time. So it's going to take an extra push now.
> Phil: The sort of thing to make it more homey?
> David: Make it more homey, make it more, get more things in there, get more plants in there, you know. Certain areas are still barren. So we're going to have a Christmas party, or a holiday party on the 22nd. I think that's something we can do a lot more of, now that we have our spot. . . . People need to start seeing what this place can really, how this place can really be different. Instead of just having a different place for classes. [9:2:143 and 364+]

Second, in addition to helping create the space, students were encouraged to feel responsible for the physical space and to participate in taking care of it.

> Judy: People always clean up after class. They always have. Literally when I started here, I was just one person and I was overwhelmed and people wanted to help and they just did. It wasn't me asking. It just kind of flourished. That died out a bit as most of the students left. But the last one we had is that we actually created a day we called "Spring Cleaning" and almost everybody, well we didn't have that many students at that point and so,
> Michele: it really surprised us, people we didn't expect to came in and were ready to clean.
> Judy: brought in their little buckets and stuff and said like great, let's clean up the place. I feel that people like to do it. [7:1:440]

Third, they were concerned to create a safe place where people could grow personally and socially. Phil explained what Louise and a group of Head Start mothers were doing at the Greenfield site in the following way:

> Phil: We're talking about social context. Part of what's happening here is that a social context has been created where these people feel comfortable

> talking to each other and talking to you and feel trust involved there that if they say something, they're going to get support and nobody's going to criticize them. They're going to try to deal with the problem whatever it is. Whether you did that or whether they did that, or whether its the combination and whether you provided the environment, that's what's happening now and that's why this is working. [3:2:274]

Fourth, the physical space is consciously used to facilitate different types of learning groups.

> John: During winter, space upstairs is used for Wednesday night group meeting. People volunteer the space. People decide where they're going to be. Sometimes do GED or writing group upstairs. Sometimes people go up there to be by themselves. Sometimes downstairs is noisy. . . .
> Pat: During the winter when a lot of people are here, we might wait ten minutes and then divide up into groups. It's not that big. . .
> John: [There are] benefits of changing use of areas regularly, so that students don't feel like they're stuck in one place. We got one of the students to be more sociable. He used to come up here to be alone. [6:1:620]

Dealing with physical context issues opened up awareness of other types of interactions and learning that can take place within a program. Everything associated with the context and space of the program can be viewed as a potential learning experience. Michele described the following experience when some new furniture was donated one day.

> Michele: And another thing that happened yesterday with the furniture thing is that one of the tutors was involved with stitching up - one of the people that was there went out and got thick thread, cause we needed to fix one of the couches and she was stitching it up and she works with Grace. And Grace of course, is very task-oriented going through the workbook page by page. But [the tutor] said it was wonderful because for over an hour they just sat there, Grace sat and talked with her . . . as they were working on the couch. Afterwards, when [the tutor] came up, she said it was great. They had had this time when they weren't focused on looking at a workbook and they really talked about other stuff. It was definitely a good thing. [9:1:056]

As I reflected on the numerous discussion of student participation in organizing the physical structure of The Literacy Project, I realized that working together on physical, concrete tasks like building a bookshelf or cleaning a room was part of the process of learning to work in groups. Spending the time talking about this practice in the study circle helped the group articulate a shared understanding of how these activities related to their literacy work.

Student Involvement in Site Management and Planning. One of the goals in moving to a group-based curriculum was to involve the students in identifying and creating their learning experiences and participating in the management of the program. The study circle provided a place for people to share their successes and challenges. For example, Pat and John frequently used the last 20 minutes of a class for informal discussion. When one of their class discussions lead to a group of students deciding to participate in helping organize a local food program, the other study circle participants were interested to learn more about how the discussion group worked.

The other teachers recognized that the existence of a regular discussion time had created a very clear space where the potential of student participation was more explicitly stated and therefore more likely to move to action. As a result of exploring how to get students involved in discussions that lead to action in the study circle sessions, there was a renewed effort at all the sites to figure out ways to institutionalize a time and place for student participation in determining the program direction.

By using the study circle to analyze their efforts to create opportunities for more student involvement, the group also figured out that sometimes it is less effective to

change the structure than to provide a small space in the course of things that are naturally happening. Efforts to start special advisory committees and community meetings did not seem to work as well as efforts to initiate informal conversation. Here are several reports to the study circle on how strategies to encourage student community meetings were developing.

1. Michele: We have tried to have community meetings once a week. And they haven't worked yet. And last week, when about three people showed up, the decision was made to move them to a Wednesday. Cause on a Thursday, which the only thing that goes on on Thursday is the writing group. So it meant that people had to come back. So we're going to try it tomorrow right after classes in the afternoon. [8:1:298]

2. Pat: Before I came to the site two years ago, there had been a student advisory committee that had been very hard to keep going as a special entity. . . . [We decided to] do something that was a little more fluid during a session, like when you've got ten people that are just there for a class to start some dialogue and conversation. . . . Having that overlap of old people, people who continue and then are integrated into all these different sessions I think has really helped us. So then, I don't have to even initiate the conversation sometimes anymore. Sometimes I say, I don't even know what they're talking about. But it didn't start that way. I think it's a slow process. [8:1:379]

3. David: [We have these, we call them lunch meetings, site management committee meetings. We call them lunch meetings, you know which has been inspired by a lot of what's gone in Orange. [10:1:522+]

4. David: But basically, there's no time for them to meet and talk about this stuff. I don't have a time built in for them to meet and talk.
   Pat: Can you do it in the evening?
   David: I do it in the course of their class is the way it's going to be. I've extended it to a three hour class, you know because we want to do math all along the way now. And I'll just talk about it, cause three hours is a long time. We're going to need some breaks. We'll just talk about things from time to time and see what happens. It will be a little bit looser than a so called meeting. [10:1:617]

Theme 2: Individual vs Group Needs

The study circle took place during the time period when The Literacy Project was moving from a learner-centered , individualized curriculum to a group-based curriculum. Originally, TLP had provided individualized instruction in a group setting allowing each person to progress according to their own pace. The group setting provided moral support, informal interaction with other learners and a sense of community within the program. In changing to a group based curriculum, they did not want to lose their concern for differing individual needs, but they had to balance them with the emerging group directions. The study circle became an important place for people to talk about this transition. In switching to a group-based curriculum, they maintained their assumptions from the learner-centered philosophy that all learners should have input into the development of the curriculum. Phil described the teachers' challenge in terms of dealing with the intersection of everyone's social context.

> Phil: In all cases, you're bringing a context with you that says to you that certain things should be done in certain ways. You know in the other case that context is interacting with the context that each student brings. So that there's that whole question of whether you can have a class that meets the needs of everybody in the class, you know if the class is a class of more than one? And you still have a question, because if you have a class and a teacher, then does it meet the needs of the teacher as well? So you're bring stuff and they're bringing stuff. [1:2:197]

Over the course of the study circle, participants shared many stories about their group experiences. Each story presented complex human interactions and individual crises that provided rich material for analyzing the teachers' options for action in a complicated situation. The group helped Judy analyze the dynamics of age and previous

group experience in a situation where the cliquish behavior of three teenage girls undermined a math class and caused a major crisis when a slower student accused them of making fun of her. In addition to providing support and brainstorming options for short term solutions, the group also helped Judy reflect on her goals for the class, the student's varied expectations and the constraints of math and GED tests on classroom structure in terms of her role as teacher and/or counselor. The discussion identified the differing expectations in individual and group learning and the implications that had for classroom dynamics as well as teaching strategies.

In another session, the study circle participants helped Louise reflect on and identify her role in a class where a group of Head Start mothers seemed to spontaneously unite and form their own close-knit support group. In a later session, Louise and the study circle group analyzed the details and impact of gender issues on the classroom as they compared the differences between the Head Start mothers' group and a group of men who had been at TLP for many years and seemed to have no motivation at all.

David received support and feedback from the group as he shared the on-going developments of a class where a small group became intensely involved in a local transportation debate. He was not only involved in supporting and protecting the students who were taking risks by writing letters, attending meetings and getting themselves in the newspaper; he also had to pay attention to the needs of other class members and balance everyone's individual needs with the intensity of a group project that was taking up most of the class time.

In all of these cases, the study circle discussion was not only for the benefit of the story teller. Everyone who participated in the discussions gained deeper insights into group learning and how to balance group and individual needs. The following excerpts from one of the study circle sessions will give an example of how people learned from the discussions as well as provide some insights for dealing with how group needs change over time.

When TLP used an individualized curriculum, people could work at their own pace and come and go as their own work necessitated. Changing to a group-based curriculum presented the challenge of coordinating the timelines of many people. While in some cases, it was helpful to have the feeling of closure that comes with the end of a 20 week course, in other cases teachers wondered if they should allow people to move in and out. Both Louise and David were dealing with GED groups that were growing and changing. The study circle provided a place for them to reflect on what was happening and identify the positive and negative things that were occurring.

David's Story:

David: You put a GED group together and their story becomes taking the GED test and that changes over time. So in the beginning, everybody's all together and there all moving toward the same thing. And now, more than half way through, you've got some people who have passed, you've got some people who've been very disappointed and you've got some people who are close. So you know, it's a first experience with that too. The dynamics change drastically, drastically in that. So again, I feel like that is something which has been set in motion that I do not have the power to change. Other than that, I think one of the things that will be important, at least in a 20 week thing, in a 20 week models to be able to bring in new students as you go a long. I'm finding that that's important. The classroom community needs new blood over the course of 20 weeks.

Pat: That's a long time frame.

David: Yuh. So I think that's going to help. I've been able to do that, bring new people in a little bit. That's really the point I wanted to make. The thing that I've been thinking about. It's hard for me to say this is what I'm doing. You know because I'm not really doing. I'm not doing it.

Pat: But you're facilitating it happening.

David: I'm facilitating it.

Joan: It sounds like you see your role changing and you're trying to find where you stand. [5:1:685]

Louise's Story:

Louise: See, I'm sort of having the opposite problem. I mean we started out as a, I mean, I started out with a GED group. And I had this sort of plan how to get this done and we'd prepare stuff and come in and it's like in the beginning, you know, the first couple of months, three or four months, whatever, it went that way. But than people started moving, you know, quicker and moving in different directions and the group started to sort of dissipate. I mean, there's still a group, but their needs are very different now and they're not so clingy to one another. And so what's happening is now, because of some child care issues and all of that, the group now needs to come evening hours instead of like this time during the day when there wasn't really anybody else around. Now they're going to come in the evenings when there are other students here and they're not going to be the group. They're going to be integrated into the rest of the people, which makes me a little sad, but it's also really exciting because they want to do that and uh. I don't know. It's like everything that I worked on is sort of falling apart because they don't need the group stuff anymore. You know, now they're sort of all doing individual stuff and they're going to be part of the larger group which is, I don't know. It's hard to explain, it's really confusing. And they've all done like three tests. They've only got like one, some of them have only got one test left. A couple have two. And they talk to each other about, well, I took this one, and it's neat because when we set up test appointments, they say let's all go together. But they get down there, and one will take one test and somebody else will take two. And they're taking different tests, not because they sort of move in such different directions it's not a GED class anymore. And so that feels like it's falling apart. And it's not. It's still there, people are moving. But it's

Pat: That's sort of partly that they are going to move out.

29 Louise: In the beginning, I felt oh this is not a good thing. But I think it is.
30 But it makes me question too how am I you know like doing group stuff.
31 How do you hold that together to make the group stay - you know like
32 start and finish all together. Because they like grow. And they, you know
33 people change. [5:2:061]

These two stories prompted a number of observations in the study circle about how to deal with the changing nature of the groups. One of the things that Louise recognized was that a group falling apart was not necessarily a negative thing. It could be a sign that people were moving on to the next phase in their life.

> Louise: When it first started happening, I really struggled with, oh my gosh, I need to keep this group together because we've put, well you know, you set a goal: you're going to start here and your going to finish 20 weeks into it or whatever, however long and it's going to do this, this and this. That doesn't allow for like the human factor. And it's wonderful, these people are getting confidence. In the beginning three of these women would, the only reason was because there wasn't going to be other people and there weren't going to be men. And now these women, are coming in at night when there's all men. And so, you know there's some growth there and all that. So I know that it's a good thing. But it's like, did I look at teaching as a group? Well, then this what you're going to face because the group is going to change. It's going to constantly evolve. [5:2:117-169]

Phil pointed out that the teachers should realize that they have a greater need to keep the group together than the students do. They are after all members of the group too and are sometimes sad to see a group breaking up. However, they cannot keep the same thing going on forever not matter how wonderful it is. Groups evolve and individuals need to move on.

1 Phil: You know something else too, is that something that happens is that
2 when people are part of a group or part of anything, that represents to
3 them a specific part of their lives which for many people being here does,
4 when that's over, when that part of their life is over, then they feel like that
5 group is over as well. Even though they liked it, they had good memories

of it etc, they may not want to be part of it. They may say they want to. They may even think they want to, but in fact they really need even more to move on.

Judy: Well, maybe one of the things, I'm thinking of two things - one is a group of people who want to go to community college. And so now they're like gathering . . . at the place to talk about did you call HCC.

Phil: And that's a different issue.

Judy: So that is moving on, but it's still using

Phil: yeah, it's using those same connections and stuff.

Judy: You don't feel like you're not or there's a

Joan: It's a new group with a new focus.

Phil & Judy: yeah, exactly, exactly.

Joan: What you were saying about that part of life is over. So the reunion of the GED group may not be as meaningful as the preparation for community college.

Judy & Phil: yeah, exactly, exactly.

Judy: So like the potential for next steps, it is the next steps. So now you have a next step group, or the issues development group, or the business skills group or the community, or whatever. [5:2:398-428]

Phil: The other thing about group stuff that makes it real interesting if you think about the developmental stuff that we've talked about. Groups play a different role for people at different stages. And if you're talking about people who are starting at stage three at the very conventional group centered stage, then the group's a very comfortable place to be in. And moving out of the group is very important for them, because that's growth. If you're starting at delta the stage before that, then the group is what they need to move into in order to develop. So you've got very different ways of using groups. And it's not that you can't use and belong to a group at any stage. I mean obviously you can and we all do. But you use it in different ways. And so what happens with a particular group may also have to do with where people are starting from and what they need to do in order to develop. You know, so people may in fact be leaving a group

and taking all kinds of stuff with them that they can use and other people may be leaving a group and they're not ready to leave it yet. You know and so for them it's going to be more difficult to carry over what they've seen and what they're going to do is look for another group in order to continue the learning that they need to do to get to the point where they can leave. You know so there's all kinds of different things that can happen in that context.

Judy: That's right and that your teaching style will change as well depending on what place you feel most of the group members are.

Phil: Ideally, yes.

Judy: So in the beginning, you really might be more directive, and then after a year right now, it's really letting go and yet not yet sure if you can let go and you know they have the experience to run it, but do you still need to be a little bit more directive. [5:2:300-324]

David: What I really think it is, is that the balance between the group needs and the individual needs. And I think the way you bring the group back together is you put everybody back to their individual thing again. You get everybody to be in touch with themselves again. And then they'll come back together as a group. Once the group starts to take over then carry on, . . .

Judy: that there's this group need, but you also have your individual need and get back in touch with what you need as a teacher in the classroom, and then.

David: Yeah, I think so.

Judy: you know what I mean, falling apart can also fall apart from the teacher as well. I mean just cause your students might be doing fine, so it might be fine. Anyway, as everyone goes back to their individual needs, you get back to your individual needs and everyone's back there. [5:2:000]

The discussion in the study circle about GED and other groups opened up a whole new way of looking and at the role of a group over time. People increased their awareness of how a group changes over time and recognized that with each new group, you have to watch and anticipate what unique patterns and variations the group will

follow. As facilitator, I pointed out that you can draw on the experience of observing one group to watch out for patterns in the next group. But you always have to acknowledge that groups "may be very cohesive at times, they may be diverse at times and that's natural, that's to be expected. It's your role to observe and not assume that I've got to make the group look like this or it will fall apart or people won't get what they need. It's kind of observing how are people getting their needs from the group at different times." [5:2:117]

The study circle provided a place for people to talk about what they were doing with groups. People could ask each other about what they were doing, how they were configuring groups, naming groups and creating new learning activities through the use of groups. By the last study circle sessions, people were describing their whole programs in terms of the various groups.

Theme 3: Individual Self-Confidence

As mentioned before, TLP had used a learner-centered curriculum from the beginning. Therefore, there was a natural concern for the individual development and progress of each learner. As TLP made the transition into group and community-based approaches, the development of the individual learner's self confidence and abilities continued to be an important concern and was frequently discussed in the study circle.

The growth of the learners' self confidence is discussed in several different contexts during the course of the study circle sessions. As I analyzed the transcripts and selected comments related to the self-confidence of individual students, I realized that The Literacy Project did not see their role in terms of the individual counseling or

training that most programs provide. Rather, the teachers and staff of TLP saw the program as a place where learners would receive many different opportunities to build their self-confidence by participating in classroom activities, program activities and community activities.

The study circle provided a place to deepen understanding of literacy students' self-esteem in order to design more effective strategies to help them build confidence. The discussions touched on all sorts of program-based approaches where students were involved, including classroom activities, program management and community outreach projects.

Classroom strategies. All of the teachers were interested in classroom activities which would help students reflect on their lives and build their self-confidence. In one of the sessions, David told about a lesson he did with a new group about Taking Risks. His intention was that the students would address the issue that is commonly discussed among adult educators that students take tremendous risks when they decide to go back to school. The activity was interesting, because it did not go the way David expected. The students didn't define risks they way David did. They saw risk-taking as something more external than internal. So he revised his plan for the second day and introduced the idea of taking risks with or against yourself.

> David: Well, they're still talking about machines, lightening storms and stuff like that. So I really had to get it around to the classroom and feelings inside yourself. Finally, we got to this notion of fear. You know and people go like everything is like fear. So the question became, what's outside and what's inside. The notion of what's the payoff of driving 120 miles an hour vs the payoff of confronting your fears in here. You know, what's an acceptable risk and what's not? What's an admirable risk and

> what's not? And that was that. We sort of left it at that. We talked about what the payoffs were, a good feeling that you accomplished something. Obviously, it's nicer to have a generous audience than it is to have a malicious audience, or an audience that will laugh at you. And these just sort of things came up. And I think in the end, it was just a nice sort of thing to do the first or second week of class that sort of talks about feelings, finally, in a way, that talks about fear in a way that it's O.K. to talk about this and . . . it will exist in here. Cause I kept saying this does exist in here. You may feel fear. And they kind of agreed to it, but didn't want to. It wasn't something they were real ready to talk about or that they had really experienced too much yet, since it was just the beginning of class. [4:1:308]

The study circle provided a place for David to analyze why the learners did not react in the way he expected. As the group discussed this experience, the women immediately wanted to know the gender of the class - seven out of ten were men. There was a feeling that the perception of risk taking and self-confidence are gender related. There is a risk, especially for men, in talking about personal risks. But another significant insight which David got from the experience was that it is difficult to get people to come out and talk about personal risks in the beginning of a class. It could be that the process takes longer, or maybe the issue is defined differently by the students, maybe it is not as big in their eyes. At any rate, it is something that needed to be explored more and the study circle raised awareness about gender and timing that everyone could use in planning and reflecting on their own class activities.

While the teachers definitely wanted to develop a classroom context where students felt comfortable and in control of their learning, they also recognized that even when things got out of hand, that learners were being challenged and were growing in new ways. In the previous theme, I mentioned briefly, the confrontation in Judy's math

class where one of the students accused another of laughing at her. One of the problems was the teenage girls who were too insecure to leave their threesome to work with others.

> Judy: The other thing I was thinking of that the accuser at 19 having lost a baby is talking from a very different place than the 17 year-olds. She said to them, "We're all adults aren't we," and the accused said, "I don't know if we are." . . . And the fact that the three came in together - sat together! You know what I'm saying. It wasn't even like if you, Phil: Well, you know "I'm terrified, I'm going to stick to what I know" - which is my friends. You know and that whole peer group thing is so necessary for kids that age anyway. That's how they define themselves. And so, I'm not sure you can break it up. [2:1:668]

But the situation did get broken up. In spite of the extreme discomfort caused by the situation, Judy and the other students recognized that it was a growing experience in terms of people gaining the confidence to speak out on their feelings and move the group to a more open community.

> Judy: I thought [the accuser] did a wonderful job. She faced it and goes, "Listen, I know I'm slow. It's really hard for me to ask questions like this. I really don't get it. That's why I'm here and I can't ask questions if I feel you are laughing at me." . . . she felt great, "I'm so glad I did that" and there are like four other people that said, "I feel exactly the same as you do." [2:2:003+]

The stressful experience created new bonds for the rest of the group that was actually quite exciting for their future progress. The study circle support group provided a place for Judy to share her experience the day after it happened and get verification and insights from her peers about how she interpreted and handled the situation. She shared the story in the third study circle and the rich discussion that emerged totally eclipsed the planned agenda and helped us realize what could be learned from responding to events as they happen. The group was able to discuss how to prevent and whether to prevent such

problems, as well as how to build on the individual growth and learning possibilities of a small crisis.

Joan: It seems like this incident has created new bonds for the rest of the group.

Judy: I'm actually excited.

Joan: It's really interesting.

Judy: And again another question, should I have raised it before? Should I have said, I am. I don't know.

Joan: How can you prepare for this in advance?

Judy: Well, No you could feel it

Phil: yeah.

Judy: A month ago you could feel it. And you were asking me, Judy, maybe you can't split people up in groups, and like real split them and have people sit where they were comfortable. And I was trying to stop that cause I thought these who got separated were ever going to get something else going on here.

Sara: Well it sounds like it was probably a lot more valuable, a lot better that [the student] raised it. I mean, you could have raised it a long time ago, but people probably wouldn't have responded.

Phil: I mean, what's your, you know, back to that issue of if this is the first time people have ever been in a group where certain kinds of things were permissible. If you raise it, it's not like it's going to do any harm. But it may not mean anything to anybody either. And I mean that's the thing, a question of what people will hear. [2:2:056]

Program Strategies. The Literacy Project encouraged current students and those who graduated to help build the program through serving on boards, volunteering as tutors and working on projects. The study circle provided a place to reflect on how these activities were working out. Judy and Phil shared their observations about a recent GED

graduate participating in the tutor training workshop with volunteers from the community.

Judy: I sat in maybe a half an hour of the training, not long, and kind of got a sense as to what it is. And my immediate reaction was that the level of discussion was more academic that what we do in the classrooms. I was thinking, "wow, this is a new language for you, I know it is." You know this is where there is a separation. I'm looking at him and I'm like, "how is this working for you?" And I sat in during that uncomfortable part when he was working at the [invented] alphabet and knowing that he's not getting it and he's having a hard time.

Phil: Oh, it was clear to me. He was very up front about not getting it.

Judy: yeah, yeah. Anyway, and I'm thinking what is this doing for him that he's not getting it and people who are so much more educated than he is . . . and this is again a level of abstraction that they don't deal with. And then I'm looking at him and I'm thinking on the other hand, maybe this is a wonderful thing for him. I mean, this is my question. I asked him, I said, "well, what was that like for you?" And we had a wonderful discussion about it. And he said it was so exciting for him. It was real stimulating.

Phil: That is what I would have guessed. That's what I would have guessed. He seemed to be really psyched.

Judy: And he goes, But I'll tell you there was a lot of that stuff, I'm not that sure I really understood it. So you can

Phil: Fine, but it's O.K.

Judy: But it's O.K., yeah. There's times that, yeah, it was O.K. Anyway, it was neat. I wanted to share that. . . .

Phil: People knew that he had been a student and knew that he was currently volunteering at the site. And they were you know, in certain questions saying, well, what's your experience with that? And very clear that he's going to know more about a lot of this stuff than they did. [2:1:373]

The study circle provided a place for the whole staff to share their observations of students taking risks so they could figure out more effective ways to support them. At

one study circle session, Elisse Zack, a visitor from the Ontario Literacy Coalition, shared her experiences working with learners on committees and boards.

Elisse: [We] have to figure out what's the most useful or effective way for learners to be involved. We've always felt, O.K. get learners on committees and on boards. We're questioning that, not ideologically, because I think we all agree it's really important for learners to have a say in the program, but sometimes without the proper support and training and education. Like it's hard to be on a board at the best of times and there are certain skills that board members need to have, that to just put learners on the board for the sake of tokenism is really, really. It's worse than not putting learners on or encouraging learners to go for boards.

Phil: We learned that the hard way. We have one guy on the board now who has all the skills, and he's a great board member.

Alex: And we also have board members who aren't learners who struggle with the same issue. And it's dint of greater self-confidence and societal expectation that they should be able to do this that they're sticking with it.
Phil: Right,

Elisse: Exactly.

Alex: We're having struggles to support them, much less someone who doesn't have that societal expectation or that self-confidence.

Phil: But we have had students on the board who just didn't know what they were doing there. You know it was a difficult situation for them to be in. [8:2:025]

Elisse was able to send TLP training materials used in Canada from a Learner Leadership Conference.

Community Strategies. When a group of students at Pat's site decided to become involved in a local food program following a discussion at the end of class, she found that she needed to facilitate a few things in the background to ensure that the students had an opportunity to work on the project at a level that was not above or below their

ability. In this way, their self-confidence could be reinforced while their abilities were being stretched.

> Pat: We have this group of a few people who have been involved at the center that haven't really had any organizational experience. Then to move out into the community and organize something that really got a lot of almost legal organizational kinds of things because of the amount of money that program is handling. . . . [We had to figure out] how to organize a volunteer team of people who are inexperienced in organizational things. . . . [We needed] to have a host site and so we had to go out and recruit people, a minister, a board, everything else. What struck me. First organizational meeting at the church and a lot of students attended (5 or 6) and then Head Start Mothers. The minister was kind of overwhelmed because he, everybody, thought there'd be 4 or 5 people there and there were 30. So the minister took over sooner from one of our students. All of a sudden, I had to look at what's happening here, because I thought his authority had been usurped. The upshot was that I went to the minister and we organized a meeting for a volunteer team so that our student is in charge of the truck drivers and the minister is in charge of the money. . . I wrote him a little note thanking him for going out on a limb that their church would be the host site and suggested that we have a planning meeting before the next committee meeting to plan the agenda because we were getting 30 people and he agreed. He called up and we got 5 or 6 students to plan the agenda for the next meeting. [3:1:644]

The discussion of Pat's experience with the food bank along with Dave's experience taking a group to the library led the group to articulate an ambiguous aspect of their job description more clearly. They had a very important coaching role when they saw themselves as practitioners who took their literacy work into the community. The study circle provided an opportunity for them to discuss this aspect of their program in terms of the issues and dilemmas as well as successes and strategies. It takes years to build self-confidence and in the process, it is helpful for the teachers themselves to have a support group to remind them that they are doing the right things as well as to give them new insights and ideas to try.

Theme 4: Dealing with Expectations and the Unexpected

The issue of expectations and the unexpected entered into the study circle through a story John told about taking a student to a play that was followed by a long conversation about movies and how different people could come up with a very different experience or interpretation from attending the same movie or play. Although the conversation was very interesting, it felt like a long digression until Pat brought it back to the classroom.

> Pat: I think we deal with that every day. I mean because people, they come in with those preconceived notions and it takes a long time to sort of have them, say, look at there are other possibilities. So even though we may believe, and we may have other students that have come to believe that it should be a different way or it can be a different way. That's not necessarily when people walk in, that's not part of their context. [1:2:000+]

The most profound thing I realized as I collected and sorted examples of this theme, dealing with expectations and the unexpected, was how closely it was interconnected with the curriculum development process. As mentioned earlier, TLP use a participatory curriculum development process that was both learner centered and becoming group based. By inviting input from all members of the program, students and volunteers as well as teachers, they opened the door for many unexpected things to occur that would have an impact on the curriculum. For this reason it is not surprising that a lot of things came up in the study circle about how to deal with their own and their students' expectations.

Initially, I focused this theme around how teachers were dealing with students who brought very traditional expectations about learning based on their past school

experience. The teachers at TLP had to work with many students to open their awareness to other ways of learning. However, I soon recognized that study circle participants were also telling stories about what happened to them once the students dropped their initial expectations to be passively taught and started participating in the learning process. The teachers had to be prepared to deal with the unexpected.

> Louise: Do you remember when we first started doing staff development? It was like none of us were convinced that we knew what we were doing. That's what we were looking for. We were looking for this kind of like formula that was gonna - this is how we do it, we do this, this and this and then it happens. And we finally came to the realization two years later that we sort of did know what we were doing. And it wasn't a this, this and this. It was sort of a "do this and then hopefully the other, you just sort of have to go from there. Phil: It just sort of evolves. Louise: That's what I mean. Phil: David has completely changed what he is doing and that's going to continue to evolve. The next class you run will be different from this one and that's as it should be. [5:1:281]

Planning in advance to do "this, this, and this" is a teaching strategy that only follows the teacher's expectations for the curriculum. It doesn't allow for negotiation with student's assumptions and expectations. "Doing this and . . . you just have to sort of go from there" implies setting up a situation or context where student's voiced and unvoiced assumptions, as well as their willingness to go outside their expectations for themselves and their educational experience can result in something wonderful happening. It can also result in a disaster or a puzzlement where the teacher has to redefine his or her expectations and find out what was learned instead of what they had planned on the students learning. Louise gave the following analysis of class when she realized that the members of her Head Start group were beginning to go different

directions and move away from the group writing project that had been so exciting for them at an earlier point in time.

> Louise: When it first started happening, I really struggled with, oh my gosh, I need to keep this group together because we've put, well you know, you set a goal: you're going to start here and your going to finish 20 weeks into it or whatever, however long and it's going to do this, this and this. That doesn't allow for like the human factor. And it's wonderful, these people are getting confidence. In the beginning three of these women would, the only reason was because there wasn't going to be other people and there weren't going to be men. And now these women, are coming in at night when there's all men. And so, you know there's some growth there and all that. So I know that it's a good thing. But it's like, did I look at teaching as a group? Well, then this what you're going to face because the group is going to change. It's going constantly evolve. I think that's a real. I mean now I look at it as it's a really good thing. [5:2:117]

It seems that participatory curriculum evolves from taking action on expectations and seeing how students react (based on their expectations) and then negotiating the learning and classroom activities (trial and error) until something interesting, exciting or satisfying develops. This relates to what Louise said about "you do this and then hopefully. . . " You try the initial thing because you expect something to happen and then you figure out what to do from there based on the interaction with other people's responses.

From this discussion, the group continued on to look at strategies and their own underlying assumptions about teaching adults. They recognized that their teaching strategies engaged in a discussion of their underlying assumptions of teaching adults. While they recognized they wanted to create an environment in which students could feel control over their own lives and learning, they also understood that students didn't always

come to the program with an explicit awareness of their relationship to their own learning.

> Judy: "How do you start reflecting on your beliefs and your values, your culture, your class and how do you begin to see that if you're not used to being out of that? You need like a second language, you need a second experience. You need something. Phil: Well and it needs to be presented to you that that's possible, that you might want to do that. Because that in itself isn't something that people necessarily do. [1:2:377]

John explained that he and Pat had been talking about ways to get the students to examine their own expectations and interests when they enter the program. They found that at the intakes, new students assume that teachers only want to know their narrow educational goals. The expectations which students bring to their educational experience limits what teachers are able to do in the classroom. Assumptions about the usefulness of education in terms of using tests and certificates or diplomas to mark achievement that has no relation to real life work puts constraints around an educational experience.

> Judy: Oh, um hum. Well, and also how I teach in the creative writing class, I mean I can teach truly how I believe I would like to teach. In the GED class, I can't. You know, it becomes a different context and I have to take on a different role - there is a right answer. Phil: That in the one case you're, well in all cases, you're bringing a context with you that says to you that certain things should be done in certain ways. You know in the other case that context is interacting with the context that each student brings. So that there's that whole question of whether you can have a class that meets the needs of everybody in the class, you know if the class is a class of more than one? And you still have a question, because if you have a class and a teacher, then does it meet the needs of the teacher as well? So you're bring stuff and they're bringing stuff. [1:2:197]

The underlying expectations have a great impact on how the curriculum is designed, delivered and received. The teachers used the study circle to discuss

observations about the difference between the students in GED classes and those in ABE or other non-test-based courses.

Michele: Judy and I were talking about this the other day. It always seems like it's the pre-GED or the ABE group whatever we're calling it at the time that's really in to talking about things, talking about the community. When we did this math exercise the other day, something about voting in western Mass from the newspaper. And the group of people that I was working with in math were more willing to talk about it. And you know we do the math exercise associated with it and then really talk about it as well.

Phil: What the patterns mean and that stuff?

Michele: Right, and the people Judy was working with were like, how does this relate to the GED are they going to ask me opinion questions about math? So it's like this real focus of how does it apply? Who has more time and what's their strength there? Have you found that more people are willing to, the people that are more active are non-GED oriented right now?

Pat: It's a real mix. Because we have next steps, we don't have GED classes.

John: Age too, the young people seem to be more impatient.

Pat: Yes, that certainly I would attribute it more, they're still adolescent mode. [8:1:411]

A participatory teaching style meant that the curriculum couldn't be totally preplanned. Negotiating the curriculum with student's assumptions and unspoken expectations is an acquired skill because the teacher and student expectations don't always go the same direction at the same time. However, the study circle provided a place for people to pool their experience about the unpredictability of the curriculum and to discuss how to learn to go with the flow is the first step to successfully implementing a participatory teaching style. The following excerpts from various sessions illustrate the

range of unexpected student behavior that teachers deal with on a continual basis. Each turn of events requires a new negotiation of the curriculum plans.

1. Pat: I was going to write about the rise and fall of a writing group. But I didn't get that organized and the writing group's rising again. [3:1:569]

2. David: Right now it's hard for me to separate, or even to say this is what I'm doing because in a way, my experience has been when students are in a group, they end up taking over what happens, so now certain things have developed, certain things have happened that I did not foresee. [5:1:599]

3. Louise: Initially in their journals, I'd get like two lines. Now I get like pages, nine pages. The other day someone brought one in and she plunked it in front of me and said, "read this right now, it's really important." And I read it and it was important. I don't know they dictate what's been happening in here. I come in with a plan and it doesn't get carried out. I had a plan for this class. It was going to be a GED class. We were going to take a subject and prepare for the test. That's not how it's been. Phil: But they did all go take the test. Louise: And they're going to take two more. They're moving quickly but they want to get it over with and do the writing. [3:2:119]

4. John: Actually what Phil was saying, I think that it's important to reflect upon our own needs in the classroom sometimes. I know different combinations of students interact together and I have this feeling like oh, what is this, you know I don't enjoy it as much. Louise: Like who's agenda are we on? [5:1:145]

5. David: I'm not saying its invaluable, I'm just saying uh, uh, that it's uh, it doesn't go the way you plan it. [9:1:483]

The expectations and social context which students bring with them to a class cannot be duplicated or transferred from class. Different expectations, personalities and situations always present a new challenge for a teacher. Louise had one class of women that practically taught itself, but when Phil asked if she could transfer the same energy to a group of men she taught in the evening, we gained some very interesting insights into how students influence the curriculum of a class.

Louise: I would love to carry the energy level into the classroom, I don't. I'm just getting to look at myself and look at life. I can totally relate to what is happening to them [Head Start women] . The men are totally different and unfortunately, the other classes outside of the two GED groups are men. I'm on a totally different plane with them. . . These women really challenge me. I'm being challenged constantly. But the men, I don't get that. They just say, "you're the boss." The men are much more willing to just sort of be - there. Whatever I say. The women are challenging, they bring up things, issues. The issues are important to me too. I have tried to get conversation going around women issues with the men and they don't want to do it.
Phil: But you're talking again about a journey. You're talking about people who aren't ready to do it at this point. [3:2:474-509]

In the earlier study circle sessions, the expectations the students brought to the class were seen as problematic. Later sessions seemed to focus more on teacher expectations about what their class should be like and how teachers dealt with the unexpected in developing their curriculum. One of the strategies the teachers used was to consciously work on changing student expectations about education from the moment they entered the program. From that point on, they planned activities based on their own expectations for what types of learning should be happening, but then constantly changed their expectations and strategies to respond to the unexpected things that happened in the classroom.

In one of the last sessions, David told a story of dealing with the unexpected when he tried to involve his math class in planning the furniture arrangement at their new building. His story illustrates the process of negotiating with expectations and the unexpected. In the discussion which followed his story, John introduced maps as a wonderful metaphor for documenting participatory curriculum. Sometimes you learn more, if you make the map after the experience.

David: Well, I think of that we have this current project going on in a math class which is a scale drawing of the room and the furniture in the room. And the idea initially was that we were going to have a scale drawing of the room and then we would have all these movable pieces and that we would actually arrange the room in reality to match the scale drawing. Meantime, all this furniture is flowing in. (laughter) O.K. And the whole time, I'm thinking the room is just going to be the way it happens in the next couple of weeks. And the scale drawing is just going to be so far behind the time. (laugher, you know) And that's actually what has happened. People are still trying to figure out how to get oriented to a scale drawing. How to establish a scale. You know, in the meantime, the furniture has piled in and the room is there. There's the room. The question is now. Well, let's see, maybe let's just do one scale drawing. Let's just get one. Because initially, there were going to be a number of them. Let's just get one. And then what will we do? Will we rearrange the room? What are students going to get out of this? You know what I mean? What's going to be empowering. What is going to be changed? Who says what the room looks like now that everything is there and everybody has a scale drawing. You know there's a difference between the drawing and the room. There's just a difference and should there be a next step? We have the drawing, we have the room. You made the drawing, the room just happened.

Phil: Well, you made the room, that's the thing you know, the same people made the room.

Pat: They moved the furniture around that they're drawing.

David & Phil: Moveable pieces.

Pat: So they can figure out, try out various ways of organizing it without picking up and carrying. Or if they say, that looks good, then they can pick up and try it.

Phil: Yeah, there's the idea.

David: yeah, once we get it going. But the drawing

Pat: takes time,

Phil: And it's also the issue of resistance to change. Once something is there, it tends to just stay.

David: But you know, you have to perhaps try it. Make sure people know it can change. But if you say what's going to happen, you say O.K. we're going to get the drawing and then we're going to change the room. In a way you've sort of set a task which gets in the way of people doing what they're doing.

Pat: It has to be allowed to be organic.

David: yeah. . . .

John: Sometimes the planning does get in the way. Like we planned bookcases and built bookcases. And the planning only helped out in the end when we had left over scraps. They made a plan how to use the leftovers. So the original plan, they just wanted to build something, not real planning. Tawny and I brought up a plan of the site which we might move to and we were going to do that same thing with scale model furniture.

David: Right, right.

John: But I think initially people are going to want to lift up things.

David: Sure.

John: Do it that scale. Then maybe go back and look at the plan. Stick to things on the plan, where. You do it sort of like how a material designer might think it's in reverse.

David: right.

John: So that works.

David: What is the real process, do you do the dry run?

John: I think of it like a journey across an unmapped territory, sort of like. That maybe looking at the map after you've done the journey, as much can be learned the same as having the map before you planned your trip.

David: But also like, you do a scale drawing. o.k. But it should be seen as a tool to match reality. You know what I mean. So we get the room, the room's all set up and you've got the scale drawing. Now you should use it. You know what I mean? But it's like why use it now that everything's

here? You know what I mean what's the use of a scale drawing? I mean it needs to be discussed. [several starting to comment]

Joan: I think it's interesting to discuss because what are the uses of a scale drawing. Like your comment about looking at the map after you've done it. Like very often when I've been lost or have done things. I'm so thrilled to find a map and recreate for myself how I got lost. Or to put the furniture in the room and then look at the scale drawings and recreate how a certain problem could avoid or, what are the uses um? Sometimes we only, and I think it's schooled assumptions that the written lesson plan comes first and that's the way you do it. Or the things I put on my calendar to do is how I need to go through the day. And we don't always acknowledge that looking backwards or looking sidewards or using it in a different way might also be a way of learning. Maybe a discussion with your class about how then to use the scale drawings. Or the fact that sometimes it's faster to put the stuff in and shove it around because you're dealing with three dimensional space. And sometimes there's a place for two dim... The conversations about it must, are far broader than what normally the definition of a certain thing is.

John: Something that's the experiencing. At least some of the guys that were doing this bookcase, I think their experience, part of their survival skills or whatever was like just doing something, never reflecting on it. Where education's sort of like teaches you to put your, to put it into the beginning of it. To study, if you're going to take a trip, get out all the maps. Now I've tried it the other way around of just having a destination and going somewhere and at night after you've done, you know looking at the map and retracing your steps. And that's quite radical. It's a different perspective.

David: um hum, um hum.

John: So perhaps you can find out what happened. Perhaps their experience is a different way of approaching a problem.

David: yeah. But I think we were so concerned in the beginning to making sure this was presented in a context which was real life, that it became absurd. It was a context in which it was presented was not the context in which the room was happening. [9:1:370 and 409-454]

Theme 5: Starting New Things

During the time of the study circle support group, The Literacy Project was in the process of making a transition to another way of doing literacy education. Therefore, it is not surprising that one of the major themes in the discussions was "starting new things." The concept of a starting point is key, because, in the words of Alex, "the starting point generated all the things that needed to be hit by the group rather than my having to keep turning it back and saying - O.K. now what about this." Finding the place to start sets the stage for the group to take initiative in the construction of their learning experience and social context at The Literacy Project as a social context and as a learning experience. This theme of "starting new things" entered the conversation in several contexts - changing the structure of how things were done at a site, initiating the flow of activities that made up a curriculum unit, and starting special projects. In the following discussion, we will examine each of these aspects of starting new things.

Changing the Structure of How Things Are Done. Around the time that the study circle began, David had decided to stop teaching and restructure the whole program. He wanted to move from a learner-centered, individualized curriculum to a group-based curriculum and didn't feel that he could ask students to change in mid-stream. During the weeks when he closed down the site, he did an outreach effort by placing posters around the community and recruited a whole new group of students because it would not have worked for him to say to students, "O.K. now I want you all to sit in a group and I'm going to teach it to you. It would have been like, They would have gone back to their

writing." [1:1:381] Although others did not close down their sites and start over, everyone was in the midst of making changes.

Another aspect of transforming The Literacy Project was moving out of the traditional constraints of classes titled GED, pre-GED, ABE. Over the course of the year when the study circle met - new classes emerged where skills were built in more interesting contexts than test preparation. While GED preparation was a difficult one to drop because of the importance of the test, pre-GED and ABE were soon transformed into math groups, women's writing groups, parent-child reading groups, Quabbin writing groups, garden groups, quilting groups, community college discussion groups, and other group oriented titles. Also there were efforts to loosen up the curriculum in pre-GED and GED by introducing outside speakers and CPR demonstrations. A Next Steps program was also added which included post-GED students.

Changing the structure also provided an opportunity to introduce new norms. One of the interesting conversations in the study circle was a discussion about the attitudes and participation of students to the care and up-keep of the various sites. In all of the sites, students participated in collecting furniture, decorating the rooms and keeping the place clean - trash thrown away, cans recycled, etc. In Ware, there was an established norm of students helping keep the place clean, but in Greenfield, the oldest site, things were different. Judy and Louise discussed how to implement changes in attitudes and Louise described an event she was planning that would help kick off a new way of doing things.

Judy: You know it's interesting. There's a group mentality, why am I going to do it if nobody else is going to do it? It's already an existing way and so it's trying to break that way vs the difference between starting out in a way and it's just what it. And so new people come in and see other people doing that and it just becomes more of the norm. Where it seems that the norm there is nobody else is putting their trash away and nobody else is doing it, so it kind of feeds upon itself. I'm just guessing.

Louise: I think that you're right. I think that one of the things that I have an issue with is I feel like people take and don't give back. Which is why this thing we're going to do in November, this national day of volunteerism it's like this is it, We're doing it. You guys are going to start giving back. And so we're all going to do this together. And when I said it like that, it was like oh, O.K. What are we going to do? And we came up with who are we going to benefit? And now they're talking about the kind of things they're going to do. So I think well if I can get them to start doing that. You know people get a lot from the Literacy Project. They don't tend to give back. And when we mention it to them, even like to become a member or do the read-a-thon stuff, it's like don't mention it. But now, I'm really starting to have issue with that. Maybe the way to start that whole thing is like this is what we're going to do and hope it will take off and people will start being a little more willing to do that. [7:1:440+]

Student input was crucial to being able to start new things that were appropriate for the learners, program and community. A frequent topic in the study circle was what people were doing to create some sort of community meeting or class meeting structure so that there would be an official way for students to help initiate new things. The site planning meetings were just building momentum as the study circle ended.

Initiating the Flow of Activities in a Curriculum Unit. Because The Literacy Project was based on a learner-centered philosophy, when they switched from individualized to group-based curriculum, they carried along the participatory approaches to curriculum development that were already part of their learner-centered approach. Although it was more difficult to meet every learner's needs in they way they were used

to, they discovered that once the learners become engaged, the curriculum almost developed itself with the participation of the group. However, the teacher continues to play a key role as the person responsible to create a climate or a starting point where the learners are interested and willing to get on board as active participants in the learning process rather than just passengers. Teachers were interested to use the study circle to describe how things started and to get feed back from others on what their role should be in guiding the flow.

The interaction between using the real social context of the community and the energy generated by group dynamics can set up a situation where a fairly straightforward writing exercise becomes a dramatic, real-life learning experience. Some students from David's class ended up on the front page of the local newspaper and got caught up in some crucial local politics.

> David: The whole thing started, I think, because we were modeling writing to our town officials in the class and one woman said I want to write about this bussing issue. So it took a few weeks, it took three or four weeks for her to actually get this letter together. She couldn't come in cause she had child care issues. Finally, she managed to get in there one open afternoon so she could put her letter into the computer and get it revised and take it around to get it signed by all these people she wanted to get it signed by. Other people picked up off of her energy. So what has happened is there are a few people in the class who are very interested in this particular issue and like if students are quoted or if student's pictures are in the paper and there have been a few articles about them. We do that in class. We use that as a reading in the class. And so this has sort of become the curriculum. . . . Putting people into groups eventually gets you, has gotten into a situation now where, . . . Student's have really started to bring in the readings they want. The readings appear in the paper and those are the readings that we do. [5:1:599-651]

Figuring out how to introduce a new project or idea to the students is not easy. As described in Theme 4, Dealing with Expectations and the Unexpected, student expectations for what a class should be like can block their willingness or ability to participate in the initial stages. Not only that, but as The Literacy Project moved more and more into community development, they knew that they were doing things they had never done before. They also knew that even outside resource people who were called on to help them were working in a new context. Talk programs helped to orient students to a new process. Surveys helped to find out what people wanted to do. But as Pat summed it up, "there's a lot of lead time for things, it takes us forever to organize anything." [5:2:541]

The study circle members acknowledged that you can't codify and package everything because contexts, teaching styles and students were different. However, they did have a certain philosophical commitment that was the starting point for all of their work. While never stated explicitly, this philosophy revolved around commitment to the practices that emerge from understanding the concepts of learner-centeredness, participation and interaction with the social context. Underlying everything was the understanding that a commitment to these concepts meant that you cannot predict how education will happen and it is perfectly O.K. to start something new without knowing how it will turn out. Woven throughout the study circle session are statements like the following:

1. Michele: And this group that's starting out was going to be a mixed writing group, but it's turned out to be a women's writing group again. I don't know. The plan with that group is . . . we're going to do a photo project.

Phil: So start with pictures and then from pictures kind of thing?
Michele: Well, hopefully this is the plan, see we're not sure how it's all going to pan out. But we're going to get instamatic, little throw away cameras and get people to photograph parts of their lives and their communities. Cause it's an interesting group. [8:1:298+]

2. John: I was thinking about maybe if they had a dialogue journal between them, but I don't know if that's getting pushy. I don't know if they even want to talk about it. People handle things in their own way. [9:1:609]

Special Projects. Although there were many things being initiated at TLP as part of the curriculum that did not require outside funding sources, much of the substantive change was dependent on funders agreeing with the new directions and literally buying into and supporting creative new initiatives. It is a constant challenge for the program to stay stably funded and to provide continuity to the development of logical follow-up activities for each special project. Funding sources often undermine an exciting new initiative because of their narrow time and focus constraints. The donors can also pull a program away from its priorities by offering funding with strings attached to a whole new issue.

An important component of the transformation of TLP was finding new sources to fund the new way of doing literacy. Special projects which linked reading and writing skills to real life issues were developed and submitted to various funders. Often the resulting activity was an outcome of the group dynamics, the teacher's creativity, the social context and the funder's expectations. The most exciting outcomes of these special projects was the recognition of the powerful potential of using writing groups to work together on issues and produce books or dramatic presentations to share their insights with others.

The writing group process helped people work through personal and social problems with a supportive group. By publishing books of stories, poems and essays written by the students, the teachers built the confidence of the group and the credibility of The Literacy Project's approach to literacy as well as the awareness of funders and outsiders. A successful project at one site could be used to educate and influence funders to provide money to expand the project idea to other sites or to continue a second phase at the original site.

Projects and publications that were shared in the study circle inspired others to want to do similar projects in their sites. The study circle provided a place to ask for details of how the project was started and what the group had learned from the experience. Outcomes were never totally predicted, only hoped for. Themes for the writing groups were often set in order to get the funding. In Orange, the writings centered around life and history in the surrounding communities because that was how they got the money. The Women's Writing group in Ware was funded initially to write about drug and alcohol abuse. But in each case, the group determined the directions their writings would take them. Also, in every case, the projects provided new experiences for students.

> Phil: When you're working with the people who normally end up at the Literacy Project. It's when you were saying before about the dichotomy between the political stuff and the introspective stuff. Most of these folks have never had a chance to do either. And for a lot of them, I suspect, this chance to be introspective in a group. A) to be introspective at all and B) to have other people around being reflective and supportive whatever, when that was going on, you know, was probably a really cathartic experience. . . .because it's a first experience. [6:1:307]

One of the changes which special projects and group structures brought to The Literacy Project was the concept of stopping and starting. Previously, the admission of new students was fairly continuous. With the introduction of special projects and group learning, the sites started to have specific times when they recruited or regrouped. Sometimes recruitment then had to be followed by a period of catching up , orienting the new students to the program, and integrating old and new groups before getting into the next project.

> Michele: And we were slow in the summer, so we did a big recruitment and we knew some learners who helped us recruit. We had an open house/orientation which was actually great, although we ran out of chairs. We weren't quite expecting the number of people who walked through the door. Looking back now as we're just struggling to keep up with basically meeting intakes with everyone who walks through the door, there's really not very much time for anything including intakes. We're a month behind now. It was something that we shouldn't have done in terms of the number of classes that we're teaching and the number of people we're trying to serve. But we're trying to be in there. So a lot's really classroom-based right now. [8:1:298]

Completing an intense project signaled a time for everyone -- students as well as teachers -- to regroup, look for something new and escape or reintegrate.

Theme 6: Literacy In the Social Context

When we first started the study circle on Literacy in the Social Context, we were talking about it in terms of what was the social context of the students and how could we bring it into the classroom. But as time went on and we discussed what The Literacy Project was actually doing, we realized that there was a great interest in seeing the program's activities in a much larger context.

1. Phil: I'm just thinking as we've been talking, I mean the things we've been talking about today. Clearly we have turned a corner somewhere as a program in that we are doing, it seems to me that we are doing more than just kind of creating an environment encouraging people. What we're doing is providing stepping stones for people to get into other kinds of activity whether it's introspective or political. . . . But what I'm saying is that we've always said that, but now we're doing it more and more. And I think we will do it more and more. That our definition of literacy has expanded or maybe not even expanded, but our ideas of how to do it have expanded to the point where it's become much more of a practical issue in a lot ways and we're doing a lot more experiential teaching and experiential learning. [6:2:287]

2. Joan: In a sense, when we first started this thing [the Social Context of Literacy], we were talking in terms of what's the social context there and how do you bring it into the classroom. But this idea of stepping stones into the community is like doing literacy in the social context. Going out there and sort of, and instead of students coming into the classroom where there is a sort of environment that encourages them - And maybe that's the two pieces you were talking about earlier. That there's a place within the walls of the Literacy Project where people can do that personal reflection and getting in touch there. But then there's also those stepping stones out to the outside community where you're willing to go along or help mediate things. You're actually going out into the social context where the political change occurs, community development. [6:2:326]

Once this theme was named, it became clear that this was an important component of articulating and developing the theory and practice of TLP. Doing Literacy in the Social Context was clearly describing a different activity than understanding and working with the social context of students or a program.

The theme of literacy in the social context showed up in many references. It seemed to be basic to the definition of education in The Literacy Project. People were aware that educational influences stretched far beyond the walls of the classrooms and that belief was shared with the students. Phil described a student, who responding to the question what is education?, replied "I know that it doesn't stop when I leave here." He

told Louise that the same thing is true for her group of Head Start Women. Their education wouldn't stop when they left. "They have contact with each other outside and there's all of this other stuff that's going on. And that's why its so powerful. Because it's not something that happens in a classroom, it's life." [3:2:320]

As TLP became more involved in literacy in the social context, they became more aware of the relationship between literacy education, learner empowerment and community development. In this section, we will look at four aspects of doing literacy in the social context which were discussed in the study circle: 1) going into the community, 2) students as resources to their community, 3) providing a place where community issues can be discussed and analyzed safely, and 4) linkages with other organizations in the community.

Going into the Community. All of the staff and teachers at TLP are very community development oriented in their approach to literacy, so it was natural that classroom discussion should spill over into community action. During the time of the study circle sessions, many different community-based activities were going on. They ranged from individual students and small groups venturing into community meetings to more organized group initiatives that were planned in discussions at program sites. The study circle discussions provided a place to reflect on these experiences and identify strategies and support systems to bridge into this work. As the programs became more involved in community activities, we noted that the job description of the teachers was changing quite dramatically.

Joan: Moving your classroom, your students into the community really highlights the fact that the literacy skills - the reading and writing are always surrounded by an organization's way of doing things. A library has a certain way of functioning. That just to teach people to read or to alphabetize to get into the card catalog has nothing to do with preparing people for the social interactions dealing with their organization. Or the process of planning an agenda. You could practice the skill of writing an agenda - but the interaction with the power players that are in the meeting - it's the whole context that gives meaning to that literacy activity. That's an interesting example of the role of the teacher as the facilitator to understand the dynamics of what you're moving your students into and the reality of what you're preparing them for in the classroom. If you're only here filling out job applications [in class], it's nothing compared with the actual social context. [3:2:003]

In reviewing the transcripts, I found that the teachers talked about three aspects of community involvement activities - preparation, intervention, and post facilitation. As Phil pointed out in the discussion, one of the reasons that teachers know that they need to be involved at some stage is that they themselves have made mistakes and encountered problems dealing with government and non-government organizations. They can predict that there will be some problems when students encounter these organizations as well - and respond by preparing the students in advance, intervening when they see a problem building, or even allowing the problems to happen and helping the students analyze and learn from their mistakes. David pointed out the benefits of even a small amount of preparation for a library visit.

David: I was thinking about the day at the library where we spent two hours there, and I just wanted people to take a lot of time to get their cards and get their books and see what they were interested in and browse around. I thought about this yesterday when I was writing. I was very glad that I had gone to the library the day before and talked to the people there so they knew we were coming. I was just glad that happened because when we were there, I think it was they expected us, they knew what we were about, they didn't have a lot of questions who we were.

Phil: They were probably more welcoming too.

David: I think maybe my class was glad when I told them we were expected at a certain time. The outer community, maybe it's not just a matter of leading the charge out there somewhere, but you know, the community out there, you're meeting someone out there too. If that community has no idea what's coming, it could be a problem for whatever reason.

Pat: That's a good point. That's a big issue - there are real divides.

David: Or at least in people's heads there are. [3:2:003]

In conjunction with the library visit, David also led discussions about taking risks in the outside world as well as challenging themselves by taking inside, or personal, risks to learn new things. The difficulty of doing literacy in the social context is that is has to be initiated with the full participation and interest of the students, and it has to be coordinated with other people and agencies in the community. The experience of the Orange site illustrates how this was initiated, negotiated and carried out. The idea for the project came from the students.

> Pat: I'm sort or trying to figure out the context of a group of students who have moved out of the classroom out into the community to work on a food program. I'm going to share one thing. I finally wrote down the sequence of the development of this as they grew out of classroom discussions basically around the issue of food. Orange has a very high unemployment rate. Last year, I think people were optimistic the recession would end and there might be jobs out there and we got involved in things around that. As winter approached, food became the issue, there weren't any jobs. Phil: supermarket closed Pat: and a lot of things. So a number of people got involved in organizing a food program - they pay $13, give 2 hours of community service and get $35 of food. . . . I don't remember exactly how this came up, it was in November and I think it had to do with somebody wanting to talk about the coalition to rebuild our economy (we have a lot of people involved in things in the community.) It was one of those things that start in the last 20 minutes of class and it might have been around the time of a food distribution.

> Someone brought up that you can go to a food bank and stand in line and you got to go there so early and then there's no food left if you don't get there hours before the food distribution starts. A gentleman there who has four kids, applying for a food basket. And the grocery store closed. It was pretty much a free-for all. I didn't bring up the topic. [3:1:569]

The study circle members questioned Pat to figure out what role the teacher should play to prepare for such a thing. David was interested in the fact that the idea to participate in the food program came out of a class discussion. He asked Pat for details about how she initiated such discussions in class. It turned out to be a combination of the community social context - that people were out of jobs and in need of food, and the program context - that they had a semi-institutionalized practice of holding an open discussion the last twenty minutes of class. The time and situation were right for students to initiate an idea that took them into a community activity.

Pat's role was not limited to the classroom discussions. She worked with the student on the organizational meetings - finding a board, enlisting the participation of a local church, etc. She even intervened behind the scenes when it looked like the minister might take over some of the student's roles. Clearly, she moved into a role of community educator where she was facilitating and helping people both inside and outside the program learn organizational skills such as agenda writing, meeting procedures and delegation of responsibilities.

Once things got going in Orange, the students began to generate many ideas for special projects. They were working on a range of things from public transportation to participating in the local River Rat Race Parade and an open house to let people know what was going on at the program.

Pat: We have about four or five special projects that grew out of learner concerns that are basically tied in with community development and probably cum leadership development with a new definition of leadership. We did a collaboration with Workplace Education at UMass - under a special pilot project grant to do some Next Steps Workshops on Leadership Development in dealing with community issues. . . . There's these issues like transportation, space (space in terms of where to do all these things). And then out of some other learner concerns grew a legal literacy project and we got a small grant, stipends and trying to have people work with lawyers to be able to learn regulations and things to do with welfare, social security, food stamps, housing, employment. The whole issue of poverty law. Lawyers from two legal service agencies have currently been training and these people are going to do outreach in the community. . . . And then we've done some community magazines, a cooperative for food-buying. . . . We did some stuff tied into local history. We had adults work with kids. So one of the ideas the kids had out of that is you should have a homework study center. We need space for that too. . . I mentioned these four projects because I think the movement is now, that there's a development among probably a dozen people who are currently involved or have been students (earned their GED) to sort of begin to move outward in terms of. I mean they're already involved in the Orange community, but I think to link up with other. I think it's a matter of figuring out the issues around, you know that they might want to do even plan something and have workshops around. [8:1:047-157]

Local town politics were sometimes resistant to efforts of Literacy Project students and staff to get involved in changing things. The staff and teachers were very much aware that the TLP students were not connected with the power groups in the communities where they lived. TLP staff made it a practice to bring students with them to town meetings. They saw this participation as a critical part of their educational process.

1. Alex: I'm just sort of struck by trying to describe how the social context of the group of selectmen plays out, how it plays out in a public hearing, how it plays out when you're asking for money and you're not allowed to interact with either the larger social context of whoever's in that room, but also the context of the three to five people have made the decision. And using that whole discussion as a way to talk about not only the process of social context, but town

government and how individual vs group plays out and what power is. Power is both excluding people, power is you know, not having the option to make a decision, not being part of a decision. [7:1:336]

2. Phil: But it was interesting yesterday, I was trying to explain to [a student] what was going on. Cause she was saying those two people must be the secretary. I was saying, well no, actually that's the community development officer and the administrative assistant. "Oh", so she was kind of going through it. And I was saying well the selectmen are kind of everybody's boss. And she said, oh so they're your boss and my boss. "no" We're their boss, but they're the boss of the people who work for the town. You know just trying to get those lines clear was really interesting. I was just realizing how she was struggling to try to fit it all into some context. And that her context was different from mine. [7:1:363]

In recognizing that community involvement was so politicized and "dangerous" in many ways, the group raised the issue that TLP need to provide protection and support to those who were involved.

Phil: The thing the folks that are really out there, hurt more and burn out quicker and perhaps get more out of it in the long run, but it's very difficult to say. I'm just thinking about when Dave is talking. When we're talking about empowerment, you know getting people motivated to do things, to take control and all that stuff, the question is what does that mean once they're out there doing it? [6:1:388+]

Strengths of Students Offered Back to the Community. Although people came to study at The Literacy Project because they were lacking certain educational skills, the staff and teachers there did not see them as people who were failures in life. As described in Theme 3, Individual Self-Confidence, they identified and reinforced students' strengths and skills through a variety of program activities and strategies. They also recognized that their students had knowledge and insights to offer their communities.

Phil: Something that is really apparent from this is that these women know how to do this [create their own support groups] and they can teach other women how to do it, including teaching Head Start how to do it.

Louise: That's the other thing that I've been thinking about. These women have a lot to offer and once we get this book thing together. That's going to be sort of a manual that Head Start can give to people and say these are experiences that people had. . . . These women really have a lot to offer. They've all been battered . . Maybe they need to be volunteering, maybe they need to be involved in something. There's got to be some other stuff. [3:2:320]

When Louise was contacted by a local magazine, she invited several women from this group to come to the interview.

Louise: Next Wednesday night, I'm going to the Chamber of Commerce to speak with the publisher of this magazine and whoever else is there. But I have so far four women who are GED are going to go, because they're real interested in the kind of women that we work with and sort of the obstacles and stuff that they do. What I hoping that comes out of this is some kind of article in the magazine. . . . I figure getting sort of a diverse group of women to go there, they're not going to, I mean, none of these women will be talked down to at all, I mean they won't. And they also won't be patronized. But they also can, they have good stuff to say, important stuff to say. So I think that it will, I'm hoping it will be a good experience all they way around. [6:2:119&238]

Recognition that the students have skills as well as a relation to their own community provided another conduit for funding special projects on various issues. The Legal Advocates was one of the first projects that received outside funding. It was done in collaboration with local lawyers. The students were excited and really moved into action even faster than the supporting organizations were ready to go. When the original funding ran out, the group had ideas for the next phase.

Alex: The Legal Advocates have initially started out from more on the model of helping one person at a time and have come around both on their own and seeing similar kinds of requests from individuals and getting

requests from particular tenant group to come and talk just generally about housing benefits. And that plus conversations they have with Pat and John at the site that I have been at as well as I'm sure others, They've come around to the notion of wanting to explore community education along those issues as a way of getting to people before the crisis, before they've finished their benefits, or before they've been rejected. So that there's more information out there for individuals to get in order to forestall or prevent something like that. So they're mid-stride I would say, but trying to figure out what the end of this stride will look like.
Phil: They're also trying to figure out how to get some money.
Alex: Yes, and that change is also helping us to think about other places to get money for. [10:1:263]

An important part of helping students be a resource to their community was to help local leaders understand how to learn from and work with people from the educational and economic fringe of the community.

David: One thing when we get out there a little bit and students start going out there. It's interesting that, I think the students have the opportunity to educate people. Like maybe they can talk to the people of the magazine and like really play the role of teacher and educator in terms of where they're coming from. That one thing that I've noticed with that, (I mean it's great) the one thing at least around the [local] library situation, a student had gotten involved there and one guy's been going to meetings is that the danger is that they will be looked at sort of like a museum piece, sort of like exhibit A. Here's the student from somewhere else. Phil: They'd be tokens you mean? David: Right. This guy got out of the car by thanking him for his visit, but you kind of have to push to help people involve students in longer-range decision making and really taking a place, you know what I mean. Phil: Yeah, this guy is not just a toy or whatever. David: Yeah, they say you're visit was a real eye-opener. It's nice to get to meet someone who and we know, and now we know, and now we know, that the library has to meet the needs of the entire community. What I've been trying to help facilitate is an on-going involvement. Phil: Having people say, how would you like to be on an advisory committee. David: Because they really do need input. [6:2:211]

Providing Space for Community Issues to be Discussed and Analyzed in Preparation for Action. When the things going on in the community became too intense,

TLP took on the role of helping the students to analyze what was happening so that they could understand the impact it was having on their lives. Some members of David's class had some intense experiences with the newspaper when they were involved with transportation issues in town. David helped the group to make sense of the whole thing by analyzing the newspaper articles in class and even inviting the newspaper reporter to come to class. It proved to be a very interesting experience in analyzing the politics of literacy.

David: At Northampton, I've got some students who've really gotten involved in this political thing - on the front page of the paper again. It's really been interesting. Here they are again, the guy from the newspaper. Two of the four are Literacy Project students. . . . But the situation totally blew up on Monday. It's too much for some of them. . . .Well, it's interesting because the guy who wrote those articles came to class yesterday which was nice. I think that's one way you deal with it. He came and put a human face on it. But when the people who had been involved found out he was coming, they also did not come. They all did not come. But it was because they're too emotionally stretched out. But the other people, it was good for the other people. Because they got a chance to say, I've been watching this whole thing. I've been supportive, I've been a background person. These have been my observations. And they got to, it put a human face on what the newspaper is.

Michele: Is that the same person who wrote the other article?

David: Yeah, same guy, who wrote the "poor" article.

Michele: When he came to class, did anyone mention to him, that you analyzed it.

David: Oh yeah, we had it up there for him to look at and we talked about it. It was a very interesting conversation. Because he said, the first article came out of a two hour open air meeting where thousands of words got thrown around. There'd be 30 different takes on what the reality of the situation was. But out of all these words, his job obviously is to condense it into a story. And after that, this one word bubbled to the surface out of all these thousands of words which initially were said. One word, "poor"

has risen to the surface. He was saying, revolutions have started around this word. The Christian revolution and the socialist revolution. By focusing people's attention on what it is to be poor. And he said this is what's happening here. It was a very interesting conversation that we had about what the difference is between poor and low income. And students were talking about the power and the utter neutrality of words at the same time. Because the power is a human thing. We just got into more conversation about the difference between poor and low income. Pat: What was their perception?

David: Students were on both sides of the fence, just like anybody, I think. Although you know same say, I don't care I consider myself poor. And other people will not, will always say, "well, I'm on welfare, so I'm just about poor." I'm almost poor. There is a line that some people draw because poor seems to have more than a monetary value. It has a human value that has to do with being a provider, you know, being a healthy person. . . .

Phil: middle age is older than me.

David: right, right. So I think that students follow those sides just like anybody would. The argument is that, look, the guy was just saying poor is a word which gets your attention, it's a dramatic word. Low-income is a sociological word, it's a technical term in a way, in terms of it's emotional content. And so he said, I want to reach people out there in Northampton. Look at this word and say hey, there are poor people here. It's gets your attention. But he said, hey, you know (I thought was one of the nice things about the class was that we did talk a little bit about audience.) Now you're talking about a certain audience that you're writing to. What about the people who had their picture there and about whom the article was? How did they feel about that word? So we talked a little bit about audience. But the argument is that also, as one guy pointed out down at the Skills Center said, If you don't face the economic reality that poor denotes or connotes. If you don't face that economic reality, that's just denial and your situation will never change. So I think that that is the case when those people said, they should not put poor, they should put middle income. And I said is that true though? Because it is to a certain extent denying the economic hardship of one's condition to say I'm middle income when you're on some sort of public assistance. . . So that's one of the tension points. What's real here and what are you? . . . He made another point that I thought was interesting. He said low income implies a ladder, it implies a next step. But poor maybe implies a separate condition.

66 Phil: being stuck in the class or whatever. hum, interesting.

67 David: But I think he in the end was. But he came up with an excellent
68 suggestion for classroom activity which we're going to do, is that. He
69 said that partially the headline was the way it was is because a person has
70 a limited amount of space. There's a certain amount of spaces. He said
71 the trial is to give people articles and a certain number of spaces and a
72 deadline.

73 Phil: and have them write headlines.

74 David: and have them write headlines. This is a nice reading and writing
75 activity.

76 Phil: But also a nice activity in seeing how difficult that is.

77 David: And a deadline he said.

78 Michele: Did he offer to come into the class or was he asked?

79 David: I can't remember. I remember the phone conversation. I think he
80 offered. I said he'd be willing to. It was interesting. The first draft of this
81 article. Cause he gave this first draft to Irma and Irma brought it in and
82 we copied it for everybody. The first draft of the article said, around this
83 issue of low-income and poor, the first draft said. "While all describe
84 themselves as low-income, they object strenuously to being called poor."
85 period. The final version here says "While all describe themselves as low-
86 income, they object strenuously to being called poor, as they were in an
87 earlier Gazette account of their protest against bussing cutbacks."
88 [6:1:307-377 & 427-531]

The role of the Literacy Project and its teachers in mediating or facilitating some of the political things was very interesting. They were defining a role that put them as mediator between the students in class and things going on in town. But by providing a place for the issues to come and be talked about or the press to be reviewed - mediating what goes into the newspaper, they were beginning to articulate a new job description for community-based literacy educators.

Going into the community as an organized group was not something that could be planned one week and implemented the next. It involved a complex process of discussing issues with students and discovering problems in their own lives which were linked to community issues as well as building relationships with community organizations. It seemed that there needed to be a period of time for building solidarity among students at the site before people felt comfortable to talk about moving outside. During the time period when we were meeting with the study circle, things were really beginning to take off in Orange. However, when we asked about the preparation time, Pat revealed that they had been having class discussions for two years and they had links with the Community Development Corporation that went back, a year and a half or two years.

The Orange site was seen as the "flagship" in terms of leading the way in community involvement projects. One activity they did with the Next Steps groups was to make an economic map of the town on their wall. They had a color code showing which business had closed, which houses had been abandoned, etc. It was a visual motivation for community-based discussion and efforts. The other sites were doing other things within the program to raise awareness of personal issues that related to community issues. Dave was using newspapers very successfully at his site. Students were interested to read and talk about what was going on in the community and occasionally an individual or small group would go out and get involved in things like the transportation issue or a public library. Dave had seen "a real big shift in terms of the energy at the site and the number of people that come around. They support each other

while they're there. But in terms of becoming actors in the community beyond the classroom, I think that's still something that can be developed a little more." [8:1:252] Ware was similar to Northampton in this respect:

> Michele: So it's really like with Dave - within the center there's a lot of group sort of stuff, people come together and they're excited if other people are there. But in terms of reaching out to the community, there isn't a lot. Judy's spending time working with Partnership for a Better Community, which is a local community group and trying to link up things they're doing with us. But so far nothing really concrete has come out of that. And it's really involved. . . I think one of the good, a former student is now a tutor. He's been great to talk it up and get people in. [8:1:298]

Another way to discuss community issues was bringing outside speakers into classes. David saw this as a way to loosen up the curriculum and expand the students' assumptions about pre-GED and GED classes. This was seen as a first step to building awareness of community issues that could provide future involvement. However, it wasn't always very easy to bring in outside speakers. During the time of economic recession when we were holding the study circle, many government and non-government organizations had cut back their staff. They either needed to pay someone, or people were not available because staffing had been cut back and outreach people were too over-worked.

In addition to bringing issues into the classrooms for discussion, the staff and teachers at TLP were very interested to bring students together to share ideas. At one point, Pat suggested organizing a student conference on community involvement - getting the students to talk about the kinds of things they were doing in their communities as groups and individuals such as battling voucher day care, working on

transportation issues, getting on the library board, accessing newspaper media people, etc.

Linkages with Other Community Organizations. One important aspect of what TLP did with students was to help them access community organizations. David described it as "We help them as far as they want to go. We just sort of serve as chauffeur in a way. Train people to use their own facilities whether it's registering to vote or using the library, using the museum" [8:1:459]. But the effort to link people to community organizations was more than just helping them get a library card. TLP teachers recognized the risk involved in doing new things and provided support for making connections through field-trips and class discussion. When David took his group to the library, he also had class discussions about taking risks and trying new things.

Linkages with other community organizations could pose problems as well as opportunities. In one session, Pat was concerned about some up-coming workshops related to substance abuse that were being done in collaboration with other organizations. The project grew out of a last minute effort to use left-over funds before the end of the fiscal year. The collaborators had switched trainers to someone Pat had never met after participants were recruited and were making decisions without including the whole group. Students were supposed to have been part of the planning process. Pat had reason to be edgy based on past collaborative experiences. She explained that "you can never trust what assumptions people make about the community they are coming into" [10:1:126]. An important part of negotiating any linkage included educating and working

with people from the collaborating organization as well as supporting and working with Literacy Project students.

TLP was very conscientious about raising awareness of adult education needs in the communities where they worked. Alex saw the volunteer training as a "form of public education to help make people aware of the issues of literacy." [7:1:647] Linking with libraries was a natural connection. They worked with several town libraries in the region to help select appropriate and easy-to-read books for adults. They saw problems in libraries like putting easy books for adults in the children's section or having a separate file box behind the desk rather than using the card catalogue. In one study circle session, they discussed the possibility of organizing a special conference or luncheon for librarians to discuss good books, helpful and creative things librarians are doing as well as potential problems.

Doing literacy in the social context requires a different sort of job description for literacy educators. The Literacy Project had always networked and been involved with social service agencies and local town government. They had always included students on their board and brought students with them to town meetings and other types of events. But during the time period of the Study Circle, they were taking another step forward in their community involvement efforts. By using the Study Circle sessions to talk about what they were doing, they began to articulate the issues involved in doing literacy in the social context. They broadened their definition of literacy and their theories about education by analyzing what they were doing to broaden their definition of practice at each of the sites.

Literacy in the social context doesn't mean just taking students to a museum on a field trip, it means building an interactive relationship with the museum where both curators and students learn together. Literacy in the social context doesn't mean just reading a newspaper and writing letters to the editor, in means getting involved in the issues being reported in the paper and using your class to write, critique and learn how the choice of words shapes events. Literacy in the social context doesn't mean learning how to use paper and pencil to write an agenda, it means participating in meetings and experiencing the power issues and learning how to write and follow an agenda so that every voice is heard. The interactions between literacy learning and real participation in the social context opens up a whole new way of thinking about the curriculum of a community-based adult literacy program.

Summary

The previous discussion of the themes which are important to The Literacy Project presents a sample of the kinds of things practitioners need to understand in order to work in a community-based literacy program. Of course, these themes represent the issues of a particular program at a particular point in time. The nature of the discussion in the study circle points out that even though some themes may be constant over time, the issues within the themes and the relation of the theme to theory and practice is constantly evolving. Towards the end of the study circle, new themes were emerging. The benefit of a flexible study circle agenda is that important themes and issues can be addressed in the staff development process as they are occurring in the program.

The themes also illustrate the kinds of things which we need to pay attention to in order to provide staff and program development support to community-based literacy programs. Certainly the key issues identified by people at The Literacy Project do not overlap completely with the most popular topics provided in ABE workshops as described in Chapter II. Furthermore, the depth of the discussion and the situational analysis of the themes was what enabled the study circle participants to engage in the development of better strategies and clearer theories about practice. When I assembled the various examples into the themes, I realized that the study circle served a different purpose in the task of exploring and articulating each theme. The following summary of the six themes identifies the role that the study circle played in the task of exploring or defining the theme.

1. TLP as a Social Context: The study circle helped the group articulate why they were so concerned about creating a positive social context for learning at their sites and to justify time spent involving students in participatory activities such as repairing furniture, deciding how to spend a few hundred dollars or cleaning up the site.

2. Group vs Individual Needs: The study circle provided a place for people to share their experiences as they tried out new group approaches. It was a place where they could describe something they didn't understand and others would help point out what they had done to facilitate events. It was a place where they could confess their fears that things were out of control or that they didn't know what to do and others would give practical suggestions and reassurance or ask question to help them reflect on their

own solutions. The study circle provided a supportive environment for experimentation and analysis.

3. Individual Self-Confidence: Mostly the study circle provided moral support. It was a place where everyone knew how students felt and how long it took to build their confidence. It was also a place to come up with new classroom and program level strategies, and to describe how to intervene at important times.

4. Dealing with Expectations and the Unexpected: Participatory curriculum is a very difficult process to describe. The study circle provided a place to describe how they were dealing with student expectations and the unexpected developments that happened as they were working their way through a participatory curriculum.

5. Starting New Things: The study circle happened to take place during a time of transition at The Literacy Project. Therefore, the conversations in the study circle documented the initiation of group-based activities and provided a sounding board for experimentation with program structure. It also helped generate interest in finding funds to replicate or expand interesting initiatives.

6. Literacy in the Social Context: The study circle was the place where the connections between classroom work and community development activities could be explored. Because the study circle topic was the social context of literacy, it was a natural step to name community-based efforts as literacy in the social context. By naming community development activities literacy in the social context, we were able to more explicitly identify and discuss a role for literacy and open the door to defining community-based literacy.

From this discussion of themes, we can see how the participants in the study circle became engaged in the task of articulating important aspects of their theory and practice. Naming and discussing what they were doing enabled them to build a more cohesive common vision. The next section will look at how the study circle process was negotiated by the participants to enable them to define their own task.

Understanding and Creating the Study Circle Process (The Process to Accomplish the Task)

The study circle on the Social Context of Literacy was an attempt to provide a different type of staff development experience than is found in typical workshop and training formats. The study circle itself was an experimental process. Interspersed throughout the sessions, we discussed our process in terms of how it was working and how we wanted to change it. By deciding to change the study circle to accommodate the participants' needs, interests and time constraints, we ended up with a process and a curriculum that was responsive to their continually changing program.

This section looks at what the participants understood to be the study circle in terms of assignments, activities and discussions. It begins with a description of the original written syllabus and examines what happened as the lived syllabus was negotiated between the expectations of the participants and the facilitators. Then it explores the participants' reactions to the activities and directions of the study circle through analyzing feedback and decisions made during formative evaluation sessions. It is divided into five sections: 1) Written Syllabus - a description of what happened to the original plan, 2) Social Context Issues - a realistic view of time commitments and

realities of adult literacy educators, 3) Mid-Term Reflections - comments from the study circle participant about how they saw the study circle and where they would like it to go next, 4) Individual Tasks - observations about how each person used the study circle differently and what happened to the "projects", and 5) Final Reflections - comments and insights from the group as we looked back over the lived syllabus and attempted to describe what we had learned.

Written Syllabus

Each session basically included five types of activities: sharing, analysis, discussion, application and reading assignments. (A copy of the syllabus is in Appendix 2.) Sharing gave each participant a turn to talk about any aspect of their work which they wanted to share with the group. Originally, it was expected that people would share journal entries, maps or other exercises from the previous session's application. However, we found that participants always had something to share even when they didn't come prepared, so sharing was seen as a time for everyone to talk rather than a time for those who had done the assignments.

Analysis took a variety of forms. The original intention was that the group would do an activity such as forcefield analysis, mapping, listing, categorizing, etc. to summarize and analyze the information from the sharing time. The mapping activity in the first session was a very interesting discussion starter. However, the activities in subsequent sessions didn't feel organically connected to what was being shared; so it never made sense to stop and make lists or diagram a force-field analysis. This is due to the fact that sharing time was not limited to reporting out a narrowly defined assignment

such as a map of a classroom or a journal entry on a selected area of observation. Sharing time included any story on any topic that was pertinent to the individual participants on that particular day. The stories were complex and the analysis was interwoven with the conversation surrounding the telling of the stories. This phenomenon will be described in greater detail in Chapter VI in the section on The Role of Talk in the Study Circle.

In the written syllabus, discussion was intended to be based on the analysis and sharing activities. The discussion which resulted from sharing current critical issues from recent lived experiences was much wider ranging than the suggested discussion questions in the written syllabus. In fact in the few instances, in the early sessions where the facilitator actually brought up questions from the syllabus to get the discussion going again after a pause, the topic had either been covered from a different perspective prior to the pause, or the question was no longer relevant. As a result, the discussion did not follow a prescribed route to connect the readings, activities and experiences into the stated objective of the session. Rather, it followed a spontaneous meandering course that explored all aspects of the meaning of social context.

Application was intended to bridge the theoretical discussions of the study circle to classroom practice. Application exercises included keeping journals, mapping some aspect of social context in the classroom, involving students in these exercises, interviewing students, etc. These activities were to form the basis for sharing time at the beginning of the next session. Again, these activities did not happen as originally planned. Although nearly everyone wrote something down at least once, most of the

time they shared something from their head. In retrospect, this practice of speaking spontaneously in response to themes introduced by others probably enabled the discussions to be more connected with each other. Each session developed its own theme based on a variety of interrelated experiences.

Reading assignments were given for each session. They were intended to be background information on either the content, theory or analytical tools for the up-coming sessions. However, as the sharing and discussion emerged and meandered out of the lived experiences of the participants, the readings which were designed for a more direct course became more and more tangential. This issue will be discussed in more detail in Chapter VI in the section on Uses and Issues Around Text.

Social Context Issues

As the facilitator of the Study Circle, I found myself in the same role of negotiator as we were describing for the teachers in the classroom. Just as they had to understand and respond to the expectations of each of their students in order to design a participatory curriculum and create a nurturing social context for learning in their classrooms, I also had to respond to the expectations for the study circle that each of the participants brought from the context of their classroom and create a supportive study circle context where they felt comfortable to share and learn from each other. At the first formative evaluation, I explained that I was

> Exploring the context of this study circle and trying to figure out how to facilitate it. What's the best way to look at something called the social context? How do people view this group - an overview of getting familiar with the concept of social context or are you interested in application and exploring your classrooms and students kinds of things and how do the

directions and structure in this study circle group [respond to that]. [3:1:399]

My statement reflected the dilemma which we were facing in structuring the study circle. As explained above, the written syllabus and assigned readings were based on a set of assumptions about learning that were too linear for our topic and our emerging process. Phil made a statement that made me realize that one of the reasons for our perplexity was that the theory of the readings was coming from a different social context than the theory and practice of the study circle participants.

> Phil: I mean if you're talking about social context, you have to look at the social context of the people who are writing this stuff, as well, because they're coming at it with certain assumptions that in some cases, I think are total bullshit, you know, that don't make sense to me. And I know that those are the assumptions. I can see that. Can they see it? I don't know. [1:2:058]

In evaluating where we had been and where we wanted to go next with the study circle, we constantly weighed the options of studying social context in terms of theories drawn from the experience of others, or in terms of analyzing personal experience and developing our own theories. In the written articles, the theories were nicely articulated and illustrated. In our own practice, the experiences were complex and the theories sometimes inarticulate. But discussing TLP experience was much more compelling. As a facilitator, I felt guilty for assigning readings and then not following up on them in the discussions. But at the same time, the participants were also feeling guilty for not have read everything. So, we kept making choices to keep talking about our own social context and developing our own theories.

> Phil: And I'm of two minds. On the one hand I'd have liked to have discussed the readings more. I think that would have been useful. And I think all of them interesting in one way or another. I think the discussion would have put us in a different context. [4:1:437+]

The other thing that was compelling about the topic of social context was that, as Alex stated, "It was hard to miss our own social context. Even if you weren't keeping a journal, you could just look at what was happening here and say something. It's hard to keep it intruding on theory stuff." [4:1:548] By making the social context of the participants an explicit part of the discussion, we opened ourselves up to negotiating a participatory curriculum through conversation. This changed the progression of events in the study circle, but it also opened a window to better understand the reality of community-based literacy practitioners.

> Phil: As you said, Joan, what you were expecting was a logical progression. We will do social context and let's look at the issue of social context. First we will do this. And it's not what happened. And I assume it's not what happened partially because of the question of what we did outside but partially also because of what people needed. And it may be to a certain extent that that has to develop with each group. I'll bet the Northampton group didn't go strictly according to the syllabus either. Joan: no, not at all. Phil: Because your dealing, by the nature of this kind of activity with people who are practitioners and who are out there with students as well. [4:1:420]

Finally, although the social context of The Literacy Project provided us with a ready-made time slot to hold the study circle during the bi-weekly staff development time period, we discovered that no one seemed to have time or extra energy for homework assignments. Phil wondered if we had joined with others from outside the program if it would have felt more like a class and caused people to feel more pressure to do homework. As it was, we inherited the existing norms for staff development time that

didn't require outside preparation. Therefore, the study circle content was based primarily on oral discussion, reflection and analysis that was generated in our two-hour time slot.

Mid-Term Reflections

The study circle support group by definition seemed to be a self-reflective process. However, we also built in some deliberate formative sessions to look specifically at what we were doing. The fourth and fifth sessions in particular contained a lot of information about how people were feeling about the study circle and this information was used to plan the second phase. The following quotes illustrate the different things people liked about the study circle.

1. Alex: [The study circle has] given me another way of looking at things, another way of arranging things that will serve as a class within a class. Very appreciative of that. It would be satisfying if we as a group could pull together what we're doing. I may have missed a definition of what a social context is. I would like to create a working definition. David: definition of what? Alex: Social context. [3:1:108]

2. David: [It has] given me a chance to look at things again, think about things again. And also since Joan and Sara have been here, a chance to listen to other people - a couple of new voices. Some of the questions you have raised have particularly been important to me. [3:1:232]

3. Pat: [I] only attended once. It forced me to choose something to look at and see how it fit in. Something about balance of classroom and individual social context - their family, their living situation and the larger community, document the things to deal with [3:1:325]

4. Louise: I haven't written anything. The thing that I'm looking at is sort of this group of women. The group has taken on this interesting, I'm not sure. Something is happening. I'm just sort of like sitting back and watching them. [3:2:113] . . . Getting a chance to sit back, because I really don't understand a lot of it. [3:2:before 271]

5. Phil: I've really enjoyed this. I've enjoyed having this time, I've enjoyed discussing this stuff. I think its in one sense removed from the classroom, but I think it's removed from the classroom in a good way in that we've been able to reflect on things that actually do happen in the classroom in ways that we normally wouldn't. Also to look at some of that theory. I really enjoyed reading Lives on the Boundary because it's all stuff I knew, but it's a different angle on it. It's given me some ideas which I've already passed on to some people about things that can happen in the classroom and stuff like that. So it's been a really nice experience, but I don't think its been anything like what probably all of us expected it would be. [4:1:057-149]

Clearly the predominant feeling about the study circle was that it gave everyone a chance to look at their work: "another way of looking", "a chance to look at things again," "a chance to listen to other people," "forced me to choose something to look at," "I'm sitting back and watching," "we've been able to reflect on things that happen in the classroom in ways that we normally wouldn't," "also to look at some theory."

At the end of five sessions, I asked the group to review and look at how we progressed from topic to topic. I wanted to know if people felt like there was a flow or sense of logic for how they as individuals progressed in the study circle. Could we have facilitated it better? Did we provide enough direction in terms of assignments or helping people focus? Did it cause problems for people when we asked them to focus on something problematic? I had noticed that sometimes people would say, "I'm going to focus on this," but then it didn't turn out to be something they could follow up on in the real unfolding of their experience. I wanted to know if having a study circle that was expecting them to do one thing caused them to feel constraints about switching to another or did the feel O.K. saying "hey, this is what I'm doing because this is what's here." They responded in the following ways:

1. Pat: Well, I suppose it causes you to think about it. And I didn't finish what I started. Today I have a new thing that I'm trying to deal with the social context of. I guess I see it as all part of an organic mass. It's sort of O.K. for me. It's sort of my personal way of operating.

2. Judy: It reminds me of the conversation I had with you in the phone in which I was saying "focus isn't working" because I'm relatively new in what I'm doing and as soon as I feel I'm focusing, then there's all this other stuff that I'm not thinking about that I really want to think about. It felt like a tunnel vision. I wasn't ready to think one thing and look at it across the board. That's not what I wanted to do. But more like this when you just think - what's the bigger picture here? What is essential to these people's lives? What is my role in that? And how can I just facilitate what's happening here? If I keep that as my perspective, then it plays out in everything that one does. It's that wide angle lens theory.

3. Joan: As I was typing this, each week sort of had a little photograph and in fact we were building a collage and over time, the different pieces together. Like Phil had a different topic each week and yet as I looked at those I got this picture of different aspects of The Literacy Project.
   Phil: Yeah, I saw mine as stitched together frankly.
   Joan: And it really did fit together. You were in a different experience, but overall they defined your role and your relationship to The Literacy Project and it gave an overview of the structure of The Literacy Project in a really interesting way. Whereas if we would have said, well, Phil why don't you focus on this volunteer training as a project, it wouldn't have worked, because your job doesn't have that continuity. It has many aspects. [4:1:548-581]

4. David: You know, I do think that it takes time to be able to change. And I think that this particular meeting, you know study circle thing, is helpful in that way. It adds something which gives people the motivation, you know, just helps that change take place, whatever it is. You know what I mean. [2:1:517]

The evaluation lead us to talking about whether we wanted to continue, and if we did continue, how did we want to structure our agenda. We realized that what was most helpful for staff development was being able to talk about classroom practice, to share with each other what we were observing and experiencing. David suggested the idea of using the study circle to reflect on what actually goes on in the classroom and after much

discussion of how to do this as well as obligations from outside to work on assessment, the group decided to proceed with using the study as a place to reflect on what everyone was doing.

Individual Tasks

As a facilitator, I was very interested in practitioner research and hoped that members of the study circle would become interested in researching some aspect of their classroom. The journal keeping, map making, observations logs, etc, were all intended to introduce simple research tools so that people would begin to feel more comfortable with the idea of doing classroom research and begin to think about research projects which they would be interested in doing. However, I didn't anticipate the resistance that came out in session two around the issue of the word "research" and the idea of becoming researchers.

The written syllabus introduced the concept of practitioner research in the first session and participants were asked to make a general observation of some aspect of social context they encountered in their practice and bring a brief description of it next time. One person came prepared to the next session. When the research topic was again brought up as an assignment, an intriguing discussion ensued which revealed a lot of interesting attitudes toward research. Sara who was facilitating tried to clarify and simplify assumptions about research by saying, "Think about a dilemma, or an idea, or a problem, or just a question, or a theme that keeps coming up in your thoughts about teaching and about learning and just explore that."

Judy and Alex brought up issues about choosing and focusing. Judy, who was new to TLP at the time had concerns about finding one focus, Alex wondered if the focus could be changed from time to time. The concept of a single focus over an extended period of time felt limiting. In spite of the concerns, most of the participants identified something that was of current interest.

1. Alex chose to look at the intersection of an individual social context and the needs of the group, and how that translates into negotiating a social context for the group.

2. David was going to be starting up new groups within a month and wanted to look at developing a class activity around the question of establishing some sort of common ground among the people in the class, building a community or social context for themselves in the classroom.

3. Phil was interested to examine education models. In particular he felt that as adult educators, we're looking at trying to provide a very different model for students while at the same time we're comfortable with the model of standing up in front of the room and delivering information. He wanted to examine his own assumptions and tendencies.

4. John and Pat were talking about finding a way to have students come up with their own menu of short-term and long-term goals that come from their own expectations and not from what they expect the teachers want to hear. They saw it as developing a new relationship to their own education. However, Pat had doubts about whether such a project could be done in the few weeks of the study circle.

Although the topics were interesting and relevant to the work people were actually doing, in retrospect, it is clear that pursuing a specific topic did not fit the current time constraints of the practitioners. It was a project that seemed logical from the perspective of a study circle syllabus, but was illogical from the perspective of daily practice with its multiple demands and constantly changing issues.

In the next session, I tried to clarify how I hoped that practitioners would be able to consciously integrate research with their practice in a less stressful way. Our intention in putting together the study circle syllabus was to help the participants build in a research perspective based on things they naturally do as teachers, then add a little bit of structure by keeping a journal, or writing about it, or providing a forum to talk about it and analyze it, rather than superimposing a formal research agenda. The study circle support group was supposed to provide a place to bring observations and a space in time to analyze and reflect on experience.

I told the group that the notes, or the journal or the log, or whatever they want to call it, is to remind them that they are collecting stuff to bring into the study circle forum for discussion.

Joan: Part of what we're doing as creating this study circle process and why we're looking at it is to learn what is an appropriate way for teachers and program directors to engage in this kind of inquiry? What's the best thing to call it? What's the best way to organize it? What's a way that it doesn't add a whole new job description on top?

Phil: Yeah, that's the real, yeah,

Joan: That it doesn't overwhelm or detract. That it fits in and builds. And so in thinking about your approach to what you do, it really has to come out of, you know, "I'm preparing this curriculum for this class, anyway. How can I observe and watch myself do that and use this study group as a time to talk about that, so that my work as a teacher works better." Rather than, "I have all this work as a teacher and I have to do this work as a study circle participant." So that, I just wanted to kind of respond to some of the laughter and shock and discussion that came from there and give you a little bit of my perspective as the person who had a, played a big role in writing the words on this. Keep a journal, that kind of stuff. Any comments?

Phil: Yeah, part of what you're saying I think, which makes sense to me is that ultimately all of us should be doing some sort of inquiry as part of our job. [2:1:063]

The result was that I chose not to impose projects or even an inquiry focus on people and instead placed myself in the research role to understand the rhythm and flow of issues in a practitioners life in order to learn more appropriate ways to integrate inquiry into practice. This strategy opened up other ways to define inquiry. In spite of the fact that individual "research projects" never really emerged in a formal way from the study circle process, each person brought their own interests and ideas to the study circle and used the discussion in their own individual way. In the mid-term evaluation, David commented that he was struck by how differently everyone seemed to be using the study circle.

While it would take another dissertation to follow in detail how each of the participants moved between the study circle and working at their individual sites, I will summarize some of the major themes which each person brought to the study circle discussion during the course of the twelve sessions. It is worth noting that what they brought to the study circle did not correspond to the topics they selected in the second session. The topics and stories they brought to the study circle grew out of their immediate concerns and reveal the variety of issues as well as underlying concerns of each person.

David's central theme was "starting new things." At the beginning of the study circle, he had closed down his center and taken a month to recruit and reorganize to start again with a group based curriculum. At the end of the study circle, he had moved his

site to a new location and working closely with his students to set up a new community-based center. The topic he chose for the study circle project was to develop a class activity to build common ground with the new groups. He shared this activity and much more with the study circle. The stories he told about working with his own groups were only part of what he brought to the study circle. His questions and observations about what others were doing helped everyone focus on the details of the transition they all were making.

Phil started the study circle by looking at his own teaching style and education models. But that personal project focus shifted as the study circle found its new course. Phil told fewer stories after the first few sessions and became much more active in listening to others and helping the group make sense of the theory, philosophy and practice. This role was a better fit with Phil's role as program director. Furthermore, his questions, comments and insights helped facilitate the process and support the group learning. In the final evaluation session, he reported that the study circle had given him a much clearer picture of philosophy and mission of The Literacy Project. Through listening to teachers describe their individual practice, he was able to construct a more coherent big picture for the whole organization.

Louise's attendance was sporadic because of outside conflicts. She didn't identify a personal project because she was absent that day. Her major contribution when she attended was to share stories about her experience with groups at her site. She frequently brought up parallel or contrasting stories to support or compare with the stories of other

participants. In this way, she participated with the group in making meaning from the various experiences and strategies, particularly around the theme of groups.

As the assistant director and fund-raiser, Alex felt at a loss in the beginning of the study circle because she didn't have a classroom to analyze. However, by analyzing some classes at the University where she was a student, she was able to identify and describe the theme individual vs. group. She selected this as her research topic, but didn't pursue it. As the study circle evolved, she found more ways to relate the study circle to her own work. She listened to what the teachers were describing and figured out ways to support them through writing proposals and organizing outreach activities. She told anecdotes and about working with board members, selectmen in the towns, student volunteers. She also participated in discussion of the teaching process and helped teachers make meaning from their experiences.

Judy was a new employee at TLP when the study circle started. She chose not to focus on a project because she felt there were "a zillion" things she needed to attend to in figuring out her new role and getting the program running. In the third session, where she shared her experience with the math class and raised questions about previous group experience, I thought she had identified an excellent focus for a project. But it is interesting to note the importance of timing. Judy was right in that she couldn't focus on one thing at that period of time - she brought a variety of interesting stories from her daily experience as well as insights from her previous cross-cultural work that contributed to the evolving process of the study circle. But I was also right when I felt she had more than a passing interest in groups. A year after the study circle ended, she

and Michelle presented a research project they had done with students at their site on groups and community building processes.

Pat's doubts that the things she and John wanted to study could fit into the five session framework of the original study circle proved to be correct. The main theme that recurred in her comments was the role of their center and its relationship to students and the community. Pat was also not able to attend all the time and when she came, she did not always speak a lot. But her program was leading the way in community involvement and so others often had questions for her about how she and John organized activities and created a supportive environment for student participation.

John's main concerns centered around the self-esteem and confidence of the learners. His principle contribution to the study circle was sharing interesting stories, anecdotes and insights about learners that grew out of one-on-one activities such as taking someone to a play or to a museum. He asked deep questions about human motivations and inner feelings that initiated interesting discussions.

Michele joined TLP and the study circle midway through the sessions. Since no one oriented her to what was going on, she didn't differentiate at first between study circle and staff meeting except for the fact that I was coming for some reason related to my dissertation. Never the less, she joined in with the flow of conversation with stories and comments.

Final Reflections

One of the most helpful insights from the final evaluation in session 11, was the discussion that emerged from identifying the difference between the written and lived

syllabus. That simple realization opened up a window for looking at the negotiation and adaptation that takes place in the real-life implementation of a community-based literacy program. Phil described it as juggling life as it's lived with the plans that we make. He observed that what we had done in the study circle process was to "put that juggling out on the table to look at and to actually think about what we are doing." [9:1:097]

Looking back over the study circle sessions, we realized that the discussion of the social context of literacy was very wide ranging. In spite of the fact that people kept asking for a working definition of social context in the early sessions, we never explicitly pulled anything concrete together. We essentially operated under the unspoken assumption that "everything is social context." Michele joined TLP and the study circle around the time we moved into the second phase. We no longer followed a written syllabus and were content to let the lived syllabus emerge. In the final evaluation, we had a good laugh when Michele commented that the evaluation questionnaire was the first time she had known what the topic was. However, her observations confirmed that we had in fact followed our theme.

Michele: But no one ever explained what the title was, what the purpose was other than I knew it was something to do with your dissertation. And I never asked. But what I found interesting was when I read this, I said, oh, social context of literacy - that's what this has been about. And I found it interesting to go back and say, yeah, those sessions when we talked it sort of all related to, but it never was explicitly stated to me and it didn't have to be either. Because it came out, what the issues were came out. I just found it interesting to go back and think about the different sessions that we had and how we did all relate to that, in some way.

Joan: I think even for those of us who knew the title that sort of happened too. I mean I just remembered like, what is the social context? I think

12 that list we made the very first time was not nearly as rich as what
13 happened.

14 Phil: as what eventually came out. yeah. That's kind of what I was saying.
15 The organic stuff is at least as important as the structured stuff. [9:1:207]

From the beginning, there was quite a bit of discussion about what a study circle was and how it should be organized. Some thought that it should be based on a discussion of readings. Others thought it should flow from a discussion of experience. The discussion of experience took precedence, partly because people didn't complete the readings in time; but more importantly, because interesting ideas were coming out of discussing experience. The pathway of the study circle was never clear once we departed from the written syllabus. However, the topic, social context of literacy provided a guiding theme through all of the wandering. Alex probably summarized it best in the final evaluation.

> Alex: I kept thinking as I was reading your "rough draft for comments only" of a river meandering. It's definitely going some place. It's very clear that it's going some place. But it's doing this and it's meeting up again in an oxbow or whatever. That incorporated both the things we'd all agreed explicitly that we wanted to cover as well as the things, the lovely pieces that came sort of unbidden. [9:1:091]

Of course, not everyone saw it as clearly. Judy brought up another viewpoint:

> Judy: I was just going to ask you when you felt like it was a river that was meandering but it's definitely going somewhere. I was going to ask you, "where's it going?" Because I don't think I know. I think, I know that social context stuff is still in my mind where I would explain to someone who's never heard of social context what it is, would be like, well, "it's everything." I don't know if I could really adequately do that. I'd really - I think one of the things that happened to me is, that initially, I was reflecting on this. Initially we set out with we were going to do a project or something in class, that we were going to try something. And I didn't do anything. And I felt badly that I didn't do anything. And I came back

and whatever. But somehow even though we let that go that I keep thinking, you know what is the connection between what we do here and our practice. When is it going to feel. I still have in me the sense of an expectation that at some point this is going to have to translate in some tangible way or some very clear manifestation. And I think part of it for me is literally, I'm like this. Because I think it was set in the beginning. So that that was an expectation, and even though you let it go. [9:1:207]

Clearly in our study circle, we were facing the same issue of dealing with expectations and the unexpected that all teachers face in negotiating a participatory curriculum. Often it is only in retrospect that you can identify and piece together how initial expectations were dropped and unexpected opportunities developed to generate a new learning experience. The following comments and dialogue from the final evaluation illustrate how we made sense of our study circle journey from the perspective of hindsight.

Alex: My take on that is that we actually have done some of the things that we set out to do. And that may be my perspective of the person who is sort of like trying to write proposals and integrate who we really are and what we really do into sort of the boiler plate that exists and that what this reflection time has served sort of in the context of a study circle, but more in the context of allowing us really a generous allotment of time with a facilitator who's quite talented in helping us sort of bring those things to the forefront as opposed to having them be the 10 minutes every two weeks of really picky stuff we do at staff meeting or staff development. We actually get all that time to do it. So I feel like we have made huge strides in that stuff.

Phil: I think, I mean something I said in the thing with Joan. I think what we've actually been doing in the process has a lot to do with the social context of the classroom, but has more to do with the social context of this group. I think we have been refining and redefining, you know, what we're about. And I think, I see the staff week that we did as very much part of this process. I mean it came out of that process, like when you guys and Joan and Alex and I were sitting in Green River, you know and essentially came up with an initial idea which then turned into organically again into what we ended up doing. But, you know, I think one of the

reasons that things have been changing and coalescing around different ideas is those ideas have been shared and that everybody is in somewhat the same place because we've all been talking to one another about it for the last six months and there's been an exchange of ideas that's been different than what we had done before, I think. Even though people were talking and people were occasionally in each others' classrooms and stuff like that. I think the level of exchange has been different. And I think that has been a direct result of us sitting down to start this process. So I tend to look at things differently. I don't necessarily look at what we started out to do. I'm less concerned with that than with what happens. And what's happening is important than.

Judy: I didn't sit here and say I'm not concerned with what was going on.

Phil: no, I.

Judy: That's not what I said. What I said was that in reflecting on it, I thought ah hah, I still have this thing and this idea that's very different. So I'm wondering what impact has that setting out. It has some influence. Having not set it out that way initially, I wonder. You know anyway, everything influences everything, so that's a piece that's there.

Phil: Maybe what I'm saying is I'm more willing to let go of that and simply look at what's been going on. And I don't think that's not going on, by the way. I think it is. But I would not be concerned if it weren't.

Judy: um hum.

Phil: You know, given what else is going.

Joan: I mean there's a real process of redefining learning in this whole thing for me that, cause I keep a little bit of O.K. a project or this is what I thought it could be. It's almost like you start with, to get an idea going, or to bring a group together, you have to name it something or give it a structure to get it going. And then you realize that your past experience with the name of that is very different than what is being created. And it has to be something else again. I mean there's still a piece of mean that says, "uuhh, you know maybe" Cause at various times, we have talked about different kinds of products. We've talked about documenting the history or the direction of the Literacy Project or different. And it's like naming a product sort of opens a possibility or starts you on a path and once you get going, it doesn't make sense anymore. It moves you to go.

Phil: Or even it makes sense, but you find that you don't have the energy to do it.

Joan: Right, (laughs).

Phil: I think with some of this stuff that we've talked about that's been the simple answer.

Alex: Or - I mean it's like, I can't think of a good analogy. But, It's some of the ideas that come up have come up before, but every time they come up, they get chiseled a little better or something happens to them. And the next time it comes up, it will have benefitted from all those times that it surfaced. And I think that this process has really added or really refined those ideas and made the likelihood of their happening, despite energy and finances and stuff, much greater. [9:1:207-334]

One of the most intriguing insights that emerged from the evaluation of our study circle process was the issue of "not naming something." It seems that when you label or name the path you are on or the activity you are doing that people's assumptions and expectations about the named activity get in the way. People felt more comfortable dabbling in "research-like" activities with their students if they didn't say, "I'm doing participatory research." Although we discussed several umbrella topics when we decided to continue the study circle after the initial five sessions, we never came to a final decision of what we would do.

As we continued the study circle sessions, we fell back into the process of just going around the circle and talking. But even though we were not naming our task, people felt we were doing something. Phil called it "refining and redefining what we're about." Alex called it "chiseling the ideas a little better." As I began the process of organizing all the information for this case study, I chose to call it learning to articulate the theory and practice of The Literacy Project. But in our final analysis, we realized that

we were able to do it precisely because we didn't name our task. The following dialogue summarizes how we saw our process and why we felt it was important not to name the task.

Phil: Do people agree with that, by the way, that that's what we've been doing, sort of refining our joint philosophy and stuff? [silence]

David: No, I couldn't say. To me it feels more like saying what it is we're doing and what are the similarities and differences between what we're doing and what we would like to do. I think philosophy we haven't put on the table per say. We haven't said, what is our, you know, do we have a philosophy, do we have an agenda? What is the thing which is underpinning. You know what I mean?

Phil: I think maybe we

David: We maybe can infer that individually. But we haven't put it out there. Because I think it's kind of scary to say.

John: I think we've become more individuals. The sites have become more individual. That creates a curiosity about each other I think. See if we were all doing exactly the same thing, I don't know if I'd be as curious about what's going on.

Phil: Well I agree that functionally the sites are you know different. But I guess my own feeling is that I've had more of a sense of a shared vision over the last, you know, six or eight months, nine, whatever. um A sense of a clearer shared vision I guess. Not, I think, you know, there's certain things. You were talking about it Dave, about heading toward the community development aspect of what we do and uses of literacy and some of that stuff. And not necessarily everybody's doing that right now, but that there's a clearer sense that that's what we're about as an organization. That that stuff has to part of in some way what we do. You know.

Joan: I was going to say as I listen to you talking, you're both talking. It may be a sense of words that in some ways, what you said - [Phil: we haven't had] saying what it is we're doing is a way that I would say is defining. [Phil: yeah, exactly] and maybe you were assuming looking more philosophically or something.

Phil: I don't think we've used the word philosophy. I don't think we've said what is your philosophy. But I think what we've been doing is taking those ideas and you know talking about what do you think about it, what do you think about it, and you know the result is a vision that is closer to a shared vision than it was before.

David: um hum, um hum.

Phil: That's my sense. I'm feeling very good about the program lately. I keep saying that and I think that's one reason. I feel like there is a much clearer sense of what we're doing than we've ever had before. Maybe that's only my opinion. Maybe I just have a clearer sense of what I think we're doing.

David: I mean now that I think about it, I think we each have to do that when we have our conversations. You, every now and then you'll say something, "well I think this is more sort of the way we're going." Things that you will say will sort of provide a perspective which is more overarching in saying this is the direction that we are moving in and I think that we should be moving in. And I think that we all sort of tacitly agree with that. You know and it gets, call it community development or whatever it is. Everybody's comfortable or uncomfortable with certain words. Because I think it's almost like superstitious not to put a name on it, because I think we all recognize that it sort of has to happen in and of itself. It's like telling students what they want to do versus letting them discover it themselves. We don't want to put a label on something which we know can happen if we set things up right.

Phil: Right. Well, I think it's not only setting things up right, but also encouraging the things that are happening as opposed to encouraging other things that are happening.

David: Right.

Phil: Boy that's great that you guys are sitting there in rows looking at the blackboard.

Pat: Yeah, that we do manipulate, or we do set up things. And that comes out of our perspective, vision. . . .

Joan: You know it also occurs to me that in a situation of doing community development, each site is taking on its own characteristics because of the learners and opportunities and things that are there. And in

a sense by not naming it community development or this or that, you're not writing the syllabus. You're allowing the lived one to emerge. And I think even if you wrote it down or named the philosophy or said it, you would find out as you continued on that it was different than what you say at a certain point in time. And maybe part of the clarity or the feeling of the shared definition, is that because of talking regularly about where people are moving, decisions you're making, directions you're going, opportunities. By talking about that and sharing that information, everyone has a sense of being on the same path without necessarily naming or categorizing or pushing it into a niche that's too tight to allow that individual exploration.

Phil: I think you're right. I think as Dave said, in order for this stuff to work, we can't direct it too much. It's got to, the whole point of it is to come from students. You know. and if we make it, you know we can structure an environment, we can encourage certain things that are already happening. But if we start the project that's a different, it's not necessarily wrong, but it's a different dynamic than if somebody else starts the process. [9:1:518-602]

Facilitation of the Study Circle Process

The final aspect of the study circle process which needs to be described is my role as a facilitator. I was not an objective observer, but an active participant in the discussions and development of the study circle. In this respect, my research role can best be described as an observant participant rather than a participant observer as I tried to adapt techniques from various research approaches. In this section, I will describe my role in setting up the initial task of the study circle as well as decisions I made and ideas I put forth that contributed to the lived curriculum which emerged.

In the initial five sessions of the study circle, Sara DeTurk, a research assistant with the Literacy Support Initiative and the study circle project co-facilitated. She had evaluated a previous study circle and helped write the grant proposal. She came to the project with assumptions leaning toward a "readings-based" curriculum. I had been

exploring teacher research at the time and I came to the project with assumptions about introducing a "research-based" curriculum that would give more emphasis to the participants' experience than to the assigned readings and broaden the definition of a study circle. In the end neither one of our assumptions about what the study circle should look like was able to totally dominate the emerging curriculum.

Our duties as facilitators started out with guiding the group through the activities in the written syllabus. But by the third session, we had moved from the syllabus to just making sure that each person had a turn to share something from their current experience. We often joined the discussion as regular participants. The following analysis looks at the different ways we contributed to and participated in the study circle. Sara left for the summer and I was the only one who continued on to the next phase when we redefined the process to follow the emerging curriculum.

Table 5.1, on the next page, shows the various contributions which Sara made to the sessions which she participated in. Session 1 was not recorded. The numbers in the columns below each session indicate how many times each type of facilitator contribution occurred. Sara was the facilitator of the 2nd Session because I was out of town. We had both facilitated the first session which mainly served to introduce the topic and the proposed process of the study circle. It is evident from the wide range of Sara's comments that a lot of the study circle process was being identified and negotiated in this session. She clarified assignments from the syllabus, facilitated the participation and re-explained the proposed task. In sessions 3 and 5, she was mainly a participant. However, in session 4, she facilitated a mid-term evaluation.

Table 5.1 Facilitation: Sara

Facilitator Contributions	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5
Clarifying	4	1		
Facilitating time & speaking turns	7		2	
Affirming	5	1		
Joking	4	1		
Discussing issues as a participant	5	7		4
Asking questions to guide discussion	4	1		
Facilitating Syllabus Task	5		2	
Suggesting	3	1		1
Summarizing	1	1		

Table 5.2, on the next page, shows the various contributions which I made to the study circle sessions. Sessions 1 and 6 were not recorded. I was out of town for session 2. Again, the numbers in each column below the sessions correspond to the number of times I made a comment in each type of facilitation category. It is interesting to note that my most frequent contribution was as a regular participant in the discussions. Although it is also worth noting that more than half of my comments were recorded in sessions 3 and 4 where I was probably more anxious to keep the conversation moving than in later sessions. The next most frequent contribution was to defining the study circle. This will be discussed in more detail below since my comments document the evolution of my perception of what a study circle should be. The reviewing that I did in the early sessions was focused on answering and clarifying questions about the task generated in the previous sessions. Once we were comfortable with our talking approach, I no longer

played that role. It is clear to see that the idea for research projects had been abandoned even before the first five sessions were completed. They didn't make sense within our time context. Sessions 5 and 11 were evaluation sessions where we reflected on the study circle process. Both of them enabled me to draw many connections about our process and come to a more clear definition of the study circle.

Table 5.2 Facilitation: Joan

facilitator contribution by session	3	4	5	7	8	9	10	11	12	total
Reviewing	1	1	1	1						4
Clarifying	5		2	4	2		2	1	5	21
Defining study circle	2	3	11	2	1	2		2		23
Advice on projects	4	1								5
Facilitating task	1	2	4	1		1				9
Facilitate time,speakers	4		1	2	1	4	1	5		18
Discussing as participant	14	6	3	4	2	3	2	4		38
Suggesting	7	3	4	3	3			1		21
Summarizing		1	2	2						5
Drawing connections		3		4	1	2	2	5		17
Affirming		1	2		1	1		3		8
Joking			1					1		2
Other Information						1				1
Total by session	38	21	31	23	11	14	7	22	5	172

In general, facilitating the study circle process was easy. The conversations moved naturally from topic to topic and from speaker to speaker. Often my intervention was only to start the process rolling at the beginning or cut a discussion short if time was

running out and people had not spoken. For the most part, the conversations evolved naturally and I made suggestions, comments and summaries as a participant. When we were faced with decisions, I summarized the options, pointed out alternatives, and asked for suggestions or input. I also brought in other perspectives from the experiences of another study circle group or from my own observations as an outsider to the program.

Although I tried to be responsive in facilitating the group process, I did play a strong role in defining the study circle. I had an image in my mind that I wanted to share and discover in the study circle experience. It was based on a belief that if we could build from people's actual experience, our understanding of theory would be placed in proper perspective. It was also based on a feeling that the study circle should fit comfortably into the life of practitioners as a space for reflection rather than an added obligation.

By the end of the initial five sessions, this mental image was reinforced and I felt that the strength of the study circle was how it provided a place for people to tell stories and talk about issues from the perspective of their real experience. To me this approach felt very different from the way we normally address issues as topics in staff development sessions. I could literally sense a difference in group energy and connection to the discussion when we were exploring issues emerging from experience and when we were discussing a topic or text with a sense of obligation to an outside agenda. The free flowing conversation and exploration seemed to go much deeper and generate more interest and understanding even though it didn't always end up with a neatly packaged answer.

I expressed the following observation to the group when we were deciding how to proceed with the next phase because I could feel a growing tension and obligation to turn the study circle into a work session to address all sorts of outside issues including a request from the state to participate in an assessment project.

> Joan: You know too, I was just thinking that providing the space to sit back like David says and look at the big picture and reflect is a time to also step back and look at what you are also doing with assessment. That the assessment is part of your work assignment and the struggle of what you're putting into your classroom and what you're doing to satisfy for the pilot with the state and all that. But having the space, to not be so driven and caught up by the task, that you're sitting back and saying here's the context of my whole classroom and what I'm trying to achieve there and here's how the assessment piece is giving me problems. So it's not being task-oriented about doing the assignment, but it's putting the assessment in the context of everything else. Or here's the context of my classroom and there's gender issues there that I'm struggling with to understand how to reach certain people. But it's that opportunity to step back and look at the whole. I'm just sitting listening and comparing sessions where we went around and people were sort of talking and sharing and reflecting and the kind of, it's like there's a focus or a looking at something or whatever that's different from the feeling of now - (breath in) we've got to do assessment, we've got to do this. And I feel like this might be some of what your staff meetings get into - we've got so much to do and everything enters in. Whereas in other conversations, it's a stepping back and looking at something within the overall picture that you're attempting to connect or fit together - that you focus in a different way. I think that's the value of this social context kind of a thing or opportunity to reflect. But I think assessment will come up. I think all the issues will come up. But they'll be in the context of you trying to puzzle out the big picture. [4:2:502]

CHAPTER VI

THE LITERACY PROJECT TALKS ABOUT ITSELF: THE ROLE OF TALK, TEXTS AND TIME

This chapter continues the exploration of the study circle support group. It is divided into three sections to complete the four-part framework by examining the role of talk, the use of texts and the issues around time in the study circle.

The Role of Talk in the Study Circle

This section looks at the role of talk in the study circle support group from three perspectives. The first perspective examines the transcripts for evidence that talking in and of itself had value for the purposes of staff development. The second perspective identifies different types of talk that can be labeled as distinct categories in order to understand how participants were using talk to make meaning. The third perspective looks at how the group members built theories and strategies for practice through intricate combinations of different types of talk. From the analysis, it was clear that every person contributed to the articulation of theory and practice.

Talking as a Valuable Process for Staff Development

One of the important insights the came from using "talk" as a category to analyze the process of the study circle was the recognition that talking in and of itself was a valuable process. In planning the study circle, I had really hoped that it would become a practitioner research group. But lack of time and energy and interest to organize and formalize the process forced me to look at what we were doing rather than what I wanted us to do. In fact, I found out that some variety of "researching" was going on as

participants reflected, discussed and analyzed the daily issues of their practice. It was not linear research that flowed from pre-planned questions, observation and data collection. But the participants minds were filled with observations, guesses, partially formed theories, and ideas about classroom strategies. In a rambling, circuitous way, each discussion session of the study circle developed our capacity to articulate the theory and practice of The Literacy Project more clearly. Cochran-Smith and Lytle's teacher researcher typology includes oral inquiry as a form of research. As I examined the value and various aspects of talking in the study circle, I came to understand how oral inquiry works and the possibilities it presents as a research tool.

Feldman (1994) proposes that long and serious conversations can be a form of research in that they provide a way to construct meaning from analyzing complex situations and to create new understanding through exchanging knowledge and exploring ideas. He proposes that for conversation to be research, the participants should be aware that at least one of them is engaging in research and that the process be made systematic in keeping with Stenhouse's definition of research in terms of "systematic, critical inquiry made public" (1975). Two of the ways that Feldman proposes to make conversation systematic apply to the study circle support group process: "to have a specific agenda for the conversation" and "to devise a situation within which the conversation will occur" (1994, p. 12).

While I have acknowledged in the previous section that the planned agenda of the study circle evolved into something quite different, the conscious choice to focus on the social context of literacy provided a framing agenda that guided our inquiry.

Furthermore, the study circle provided a specific time and place situated in the complex context of a community-based literacy program where a long and serious conversation could extend over at least twelve planned sessions. In recording, transcribing and analyzing the information from these on-going conversations, I have used them for a very specific research purpose. But, it was also clear during the course of the study circles that everyone who participated was also engaging in an informal inquiry process that moved between the reflection in the study circle and action in the classroom. This section focuses on some of the ways that talking or conversation in the study circle made a difference in what was understood and learned.

In the beginning of the study circle, we still hadn't sorted out the precise details of our approach. Although discussion was clearly the central component, we also planned to introduce new ideas about teacher research and expected that between sessions people would practice collecting data which could be reviewed and discussed in the following session. In retrospect, our model for the study circle was similar to the traditional staff development models where theory is introduced, practiced and implemented with feedback and coaching.

However, our study circle plan was also based on democratic discussion and it was the process of talking things out within the group that transformed our process into an alternative model. Even though we were not facilitating a process such as those discussed in chapter III (Arnold, et al. 1991), in session 2, when Sara introduced the concept of including students in research activities, the group responded by examining

their own experience and then started looking for patterns in their own practice to redefine the concept in their own terms. The following excerpt illustrates this process.

Sara: How do you think they [students] would respond if you involved them explicitly in a research activity?

David: I'd say "What's research?"

Pat: It depends on what kind.

Sara: Like what we're doing here. If you suggested to them, let's take a look at our class as a community, or let's take a look at directed teaching vs learner centered learning or whatever. Would that interest them, would they, do you think you'd get more interesting information? [long silence] Or maybe that would be a way to open it up to them and find out something that they want to know about.

Pat: Well, John in a way, some of the discussions you had in January, I mean were sort of getting at it. Do you know what I mean? About what people felt or how they wanted the center set up. But that certainly did not include everybody. . . . [digression into brief discussion about using journals]

Judy: A couple of things come to mind when you raise that question, Sara, and its one of the things that came to mind when I was reading the Lytle article and its how we categorize, you know she's talking about literacy as skills and literacy as practice and I'm like, it's all of that. You know its all of that and when you throw out one, its this thing of where the pendulum goes.

Pat: exactly

Judy: Like you know, its this thing that what becomes sacred and what becomes taboo, and its like, oh I don't do that, but I do. Anyway, I find like it's all of that. And your question, . . . can your students do research and I'm thinking, looking all these different classes that I teach and each one to me has such a different flavor and I'm not exactly sure why.

Phil: The writing group is doing research,

Judy: Well, they are,

Phil: not on this issue, but they're.

Judy: and the student management group aren't they trying to figure out how we're going to do a fundraiser and then, you know, the social studies, they're now doing oral histories and they're trying to figure that out, so I'm thinking, well, in a way it's happening all the time. But then you raise the question and the <u>way</u> that you raised it, made me say, "oh we don't do these things." You know what I mean. . . . I found myself reacting but that's ridiculous. But it's the formality of it. You know it's like, OK, today we begin and this is . . it doesn't happen -

Phil: it happens more organically.

Judy: It does in a way, but then I'm thinking, maybe we should, . . . anyway, that's why I was silent. This was all going through my mind.

Sara: And that brings up another point about the importance of presenting it in a way that's not alienating and doesn't sound like research.

Phil: or presenting it at some point, and timing is another issue, presenting it as, you know this is something we've been doing and here's how we've been doing it and can we do this to look at this question which is something that is interesting to me. Is it interesting to you?

Alex: Cause initially, somewhere along the line, we have to present it. "We're going to do oral histories - What?" So presenting it has already happened in some instances.

Pat: Right.

Judy: But then I think of my math class and it's like is research happening in there?

Phil: You're researching how to teach a math class which as far as I can tell it's participatory in that the students are involved in that as well.

Judy: Anyway, how structured it becomes, how formal - the formality of it, narrowing it down, (unclear). Looking at journals has got me thinking maybe I should be doing it in a different way. So your question, well maybe I can really use that research more and in different ways. Is that what the question becomes or is that just a piece of it? It's not an either or, it's a how much.

David: I mean to me, the research thing is sort of the, it's the "RE" part of it, it's the matter of looking back at. You know, whatever it is, because you know if we as a class can do some sort of looking back at, I mean to me that sounds like research that can happen. If we can reflect in some way on what's happening.

Judy: yeah, right.

David: Because I have this baggage attached to the term research too - go to the library take out numbers, you know,

Alex: look up stuff that people have already done before.

David: yeah, and something which is outside and that sounds to me like it would be way outside. But if we can in some way look back at what we are doing. Maybe that qualifies as including students.

Judy: You know one thing Dave, as you're starting a new. One of my students told me. . . when I said like three months later, "you know the way we're doing these groups, I don't think there's a lot of places that do like a group math class and a group this or a group that. It's pretty interesting and I'm trying to figure out how this works." He said, "why didn't you tell us that the first day?" you know, why didn't you tell us the day that we started "listen, we're kind of experimenting with whether this works and I don't really know, so I'm kind of learning as I go along." And I was just thinking, I'm an idiot, Why didn't I say that. But it would be a great thing for you to.

Alex: That's precisely what Sara's just asked you guys to do.

Judy: What?

Alex: In terms of research, that's precisely what she's asked you to do.

Phil: Right, the point is, let's change the term, because what we're talking about doing is not research, but a study.

[Everybody talking at once.]

John: I think I reacted the same way. So like a word investigate, I find exciting. But research looks like hard work.

92 Phil: Yeah, we're talking about doing a study or an investigation or
93 something like that. And the two have come to be sort of equivalent in
94 academic terms, but they're really not. As Dave said research means to go
95 back and look at something again.

96 Sara: So we're not researchers, we're sleuths.

97 Phil: Essentially, yeah. [1:2:423-524]

One of the key things the group identified about research was that the concept needed to be approached in a way that is not alienating and doesn't sound like research. Certainly, they were not the only ones to have a negative reaction to the word research. Lytle & Cochran-Smith and their colleagues are now using the term inquiry to describe their work. In many ways, "action research" is a natural part of the teaching process and when teachers recognize that it is similar to something they've been doing all along, they can find a way to name it, structure it and systematize or formalize their approach.

Talking is also valuable because it enables people to share the work of figuring things out. By taking the thinking out of one person's head and putting the ideas or stories in a public forum, others can identify, verify and critique the underlying strategies and issues in a particular situation. Some of the benefits of talking about practice as a strategy for staff development include having others help point out the things you are doing, seeing more clearly when advising others, and working together to make meaning.

Often teachers come away from staff development workshops feeling like they can never implement a new skill presented by an expert or experienced teacher because their learners are a lower level, or their situation is more complex, or they don't have the

resources. Having time to discuss the skills, ideas and issues in more detail with other practitioners gives people an opportunity to describe what their classes are really like and analyze how their classrooms are different or similar from the glowing examples they assume exist behind formal presentations or suggestions of new ideas.

In the discussion about research, Judy started by remaining silent and judging her own work below the standard she assumed Sara was describing. When she began to describe her efforts, others who knew her work joined in to point out things she was doing that could in fact be labeled as "research." By examining the many different ways Judy brought a research perspective into her various classes, the group began to make sense of their work and redefine research in terms of patterns they saw in their own practice. Judy arrived at a more complete understanding at the end of the conversation when she was able to advise David on how to start the process in his class and Alex pointed out that she was in fact describing the type of intervention that Sara had suggested.

Being able to clarify someone's role was a common contribution which listeners made in the study circle conversations. There are so many things that contribute to a participatory curriculum process that it is sometimes difficult for teachers to take full credit for causing something to happen. Both David and Louise described groups to the study circle that had taken off on their own initiative creating their learning process with journals and newspapers. David introduced his story by saying, "right now it's hard for me to separate, or even to say this is what I'm doing because in a way, my experience has been when students are in a group, they end up taking over what happens, so now certain

things have developed, certain things have happened that I did not foresee." Even though Phil pointed out that he was the person facilitating or allowing it to happen, David still admitted that it felt "like a disaster. That it could fall apart." [5:1:599-685]

The first time Louise described her Head Start women's group, she punctuated the story with the phrase, "I don't know." It was her first group experience and she was thrilled that it was going so well, but she hadn't fully analyzed her own role in the group dynamics. David must have identified with her feelings about things just happening and asked her for details that helped to clarify her role.

David: I'm just sort of curious about what happened between when the idea came up, disappeared and re-emerged. What do you think happened in between those two times? Did something happen that was necessary?

Louise: I don't know. Initially we talked about writing and the importance of writing and they all did journals. They talked about like putting something together. And then the journal writing sort of took over. Everyone writes a journal and I always write back, incredible stuff and I was just making comments. I wrote to someone "I admire your strength and at some point if you are comfortable, maybe you could share this because at this time, one of the other women was going through a similar experience, but we didn't talk about it. And about a week later, it came out and she talked about it. I don't know. They've done it.

David: But you had a key thing that you did in there. You said, "maybe if you want at some time, you might share this." [3:2:200]

Types of Talk Used in the Study Circle Process

Part of my underlying premise in designing a staff development process for community-based literacy programs is that the process used in staff development should model and/or reflect the process used by the program. As mentioned in Chapter III, community-based literacy approaches start from where the people are and learn from

them how to design the education process. I felt that understanding how practitioners talked about their own program was a key to understanding how to organize an appropriate staff development experience.

Beginning with the premise that the task of the study circle is to articulate the theory and practice, I see the process of talking as the vehicle to make this happen. In analyzing the transcripts from the study circle support group sessions, I identified seven ways that talk was used to describe and develop the theory and practice of The Literacy Project. The seven types of talk are described briefly below with short examples. The following section will look at more extended examples from complete discussions to analyze how the different types of talk overlap and interconnect in real conversation to construct a complete picture of the theory or practice which is being developed.

Story Telling

Stories are the grist for the theory and practice building process. In the context of study circle discussions, they most often appear in the form of brief anecdotes, although sometimes a person will tell a complete story with a crisis to be resolved and an intricate plot (see Feldman, 1994). Sometimes the story teller will describe an experience in detail, but more often, the story comes out through a variety of ways as the person participates in an interactive discussion. Sometimes a piece of a story motivates others in the group to ask a lot of questions to find out more details. Other times, the story teller realizes that within the story or experience there are little pieces which illustrate a point, broaden and issue, or run a parallel example to someone else's story. Stories are

presented as "raw data" which is then explored from various perspectives to make meaning and strategize action for practice.

Stories are brought to the group for a number of reasons such as an interesting event that raised a question, caused discomfort or excitement. Sometimes a story is only a sentence or two, other times it is several paragraphs long. In a couple of instances a person prepared a written description of an event in advance. But generally the stories were presented orally in response to something which was being discussed in the group or because they were something that had been on a person's mind for a while. Stories appear in two distinct locations in the theory and practice building process. One is at the beginning as a stimulus to the process. The second is in the middle of the process to illustrate a point or explicate the theory further.

Example of a Story that Starts a Discussion. In the study circle process, each person gets a turn to speak about what is going on in their program. Often, they begin their turn by telling a story. The following story told by John was related to something Alex had brought up earlier about dealing with all the different individual needs and expectations in a classroom. John's story came from a totally different angle and prompted quite a long discussion about violence in movies and society. But the discussion, even though it appeared on the surface to digress, essentially was focused on the issue of how can a group of people be in the same situation (a movie or a class) and come away with totally different experiences? This story was the basis for articulating the theme of Dealing with Expectations and the Unexpected.

John: Well, I was thinking of an experience yesterday, after listening to Alex, I thought oh, well I had an experience yesterday where I made a lot of assumptions about context. I went to a performance with a student. Ida B. Wells. Two black women actresses in this performance. I didn't consciously assume this, but I sort of assumed that maybe everybody had the same background or understanding of history and knew what lynching were all about. And when I left the play after over an hour of hearing the word lynched or lynching over and over in the play. The student I was with, I mentioned lynchings to him and he, that isn't what made an impression on him. He wasn't moved. He just assumed that well, the men were lynched because they raped. That every man was lynched for every woman that got raped. So he had no, he had never seen pictures or photographs of lynchings. Phil: Had no sense of people being railroaded into. John: Right. Because I used to collect books of old photographs. And people down here look like they're at a picnic and bodies hanging from trees. And so, well to make a long story short. I was just making more assumptions about the rest of the audience of students. [1:2:593]

Example of a Story that Further Explicates a Theory. Phil told the following story from his personal life during a discussion trying to figure out why many students were not able to recognize their own abilities. Again, even though it had nothing to do with a literacy class, it gave a personal insight into human nature and how we develop our self perceptions. The story served as a concrete metaphor for the theory we were building about individual self-confidence and the effort we were making to come up with strategies for building the self-confidence of students through effective teaching practices.

1 Phil: But that the other thing is that we are, you know, our memories of
2 that kind of stuff which goes into exactly what John is talking about are
3 sometimes very different from reality. I remember when I had kids, I
4 found out all sorts of things about myself from my parents that I had not
5 known. You know one of my kids was doing a jigsaw puzzle at age two
6 or three and I was thinking he was really good at puzzles. And my father
7 said, well that's not surprising, you were amazing at puzzles when you
8 were a little kid. I remember struggling with puzzles. I remember them
9 being really hard and always being down on myself for not being able to

do them. (laughter) And my father was saying, gee, for a little kid you were incredible. You know it's like, wait a minute.

David: Hearing from somebody else, you know something which can be valuable. Because now you really believe that you were very good at puzzles.

Phil: And of course, what I understand is that my perspective is from, you know I was comparing myself to something entirely different. And you know that's in a lot of cases, the kind of situation that these folks have been in as well. You know, but they don't know that and they're never going to hear that is the problem. You know if it is true.

David: They're never going to hear what?

Phil: they're never going to hear, "oh actually, you were very good at that. You know or actually you know you weren't such a bad reader. You know it's just that you needed some time." You know your second grade teacher saying, well really, I was just trying to get you motivated by telling you that you weren't doing very well, or something. It's that kind of thing. It may have been the totally wrong thing to do. But, that might

John: The place within them where they can tell themselves that. Is that totally out of commission?

Phil: No, I don't think it's, well it depends what you mean.

Judy: I would say with the majority, definitely not. With some people.

Joan: And it will all take varying degrees of time and support to get it back in.

Phil: Yeah, it's something that's not going to happen because of a flash of insight. I think it's fair to say that. But it doesn't mean it can't happen. [2:2:494-523]

Hypothesis Formation (Analyzed Observation/Theorizing)

In this type of talking, the person has been thinking about an experience, event or student behavior and trying to develop an hypothesis about the underlying issues and causes. I use the term hypothesis in its most generalized sense of a hunch about

underlying causes that guides further inquiry and problem solving. It in no sense refers to the highly technical definition of formal research. Part of the difficulty in working with practitioners in oral inquiry or practitioner research is to demystify the technical language of research and to find words that describe the processes. Hypothesis carries a lot of baggage from scientific research, yet it also carries meanings that no other word can convey for discussing the process of looking for root causes.

The speaker usually introduces their story with a hypothesis, question or theory about what they think is going on. As they tell the story, they include some of their interpretations. As in some of the other types of talk, there is also an assisted form of hypothesis formation. Sometimes an individual hasn't had time to think through the experience before bringing it up in the study circle, other times, for various reasons, they aren't able to pinpoint a workable hypothesis. In either case, there needs to be a clarification or formation of the hypothesis before any theory and practice building, or even simple problem-solving, can take place within the group. In both cases, the members of the group assist the person in forming a hypothesis through asking questions and sharing ideas and examples.

Example of Personal Hypothesis Formation.

> Judy: My main question is for most of the students that we have or that I've seen, how many of them have had prior group-types of experiences? And what types of it? Is it mostly women, is it mostly their families? What about degree of alienation that people might have felt? And here they are coming together. And I'm assuming that they don't have many opportunities for like coming together and discussing. But I might be wrong. And maybe it is happening in another place with them. Maybe it's happening in churches, maybe it's happening in Dunkin Donuts, maybe it's, you know, maybe it's happening somewhere. Phil: Hmm, interesting subject. Judy: Yeah, and stems from, because I do mostly

group work and I'm experiencing in classes that there are really issues around group norms, how do you respect each other, when conflict happens how do you work it out? And I had an example last night where someone essentially walked out of the classroom. It was again in the math class where the dynamics are hard. It's very hard. [2.12.527]

Judy went on to tell the story of some particularly difficult interpersonal problems in her math group. Additional pieces of the story came out as the study circle participants questioned her about various issues and worked with her to figure out the group dynamics and solve the immediate problem. Judy's questions about groups and her efforts to develop a hypothesis about prior group experiences and class participation reflect her efforts to develop and articulate her personal theory of teaching. Although she did not pursue her hypothesis actively in other study circle sessions, her interest in the role of groups continued to play an important role in her theory and practice. In the year following the study circle sessions, she carried out a small inquiry project on groups which she presented at a statewide conference.

Example of Assisted Hypothesis Formation. The discussion of Louise's men's group described is an example of how the study circle participants helped to articulate a hypothesis. Louise had explained how her class of women really challenged her while the men were just sort of willing to be spoon-fed. There were many layers of issues which the study circle discussion helped uncover. The following excerpt illustrates how the group identified gender issues as a possible hypothesis for the challenge Louise was facing.

1 Phil: I'm just trying to sort something out in my head. The thing Kit said
2 about safety. These guys may be secure in this group. But if they felt safe
3 writing, they'd be writing.

Louise: They write other stuff, just not journals.

Phil:O.K.. that's another issue.

Louise, They all write, just not in journals.

David: Is there a reason for that?

Louise: I haven't found it out yet.

David: As a group, every single one will not write a journal.

Louise, Every one of them.

Alex: How many are there?

Louise: about seven, they're all men.

Phil: This is only one of several classes. They've all been here for several years.

David (responding to an earlier comment by Pat): What does that mean, Male Bonding? I don't understand what that means.

Louise: I don't either. That's a new term. [pause] The social context of the classroom changes so much. Two male volunteers took over. One of them called me the next day and he told me all about what had gone on. And I said, how did you do that? He said, I don't know. I mean stuff happened. Like when I'm in here, I'm the only female with all these guys.

Phil: There you go.

David: That's what you mean. It's not that they don't connect with each other, but that they don't connect with the teacher in a way

Louise: But they do connect with me.

David: But they connect differently with a male teacher than they do with you. What happened in the class where there was a male leader?

Louise: There was a lot of guy stuff.

David: Like what?

30 Louise: Conversations that were like guy conversations.

31 Kit: Lots of --- talk?

32 Louise: Lots of --- talk, but they do that to me.

33 David: But what was different?

34 Phil: Louise, think about your group of women. I'm real good at making
35 people comfortable and all of that stuff and I'm fairly nonthreatening man,
36 but if I were running that group, it wouldn't be happening and you know it
37 wouldn't be.

38 Pat: Maybe there are gender issues.

39 Phil: yeah, absolutely, absolutely. [3:2:557-598]

Since Louise was the only teacher at the site, there was not much that could be done to change the gender of the teacher to solve the problem of the class stagnating. However, once the hypothesis was proposed, it opened the door to looking at how to use volunteers and integrate women into the class as well as work on some of the other hypotheses about the self-confidence of the men, the developmental level of the group, etc. Gender emerged an underlying hypothesis for others in the study circle in looking at classroom dynamics. It was even mentioned as a possible topic for the second phase of the study circle.

Self-Observation

The most self-evident form of this type of talking is when a person has reflected on their practice and is able to describe to the group what they see themselves doing. I have also included in this category situations where another person provides the information that enables someone to observe him or herself. Self-observation talk is an

important piece of the support group dimension of this staff development process. The study circle as a support group provides a safe place for individuals to talk about how they see themselves as administrators or teachers and to get positive as well as constructive feedback from others.

Example of Personal Self Observation

> Phil: Anyway, I guess the other thing for me that you know I'm constantly struggling with is that whole teacher, you know we've talked about it here before and we've talked about it in other contexts, is my, you know, my immediate proclivity is to lecture. You know and I do that in the rest of my life tool. You know turn me on and I start to talk. And, you know I really think I have been doing a lot better in this training. I've been very careful to look for activities where I could get people doing stuff and then discussing it. And just trying to keep my mouth shut and that seems to have worked fairly well. But I still want to jump in. [2.9.415]

It was interesting to have Phil introduce this observation to the study circle himself. The accuracy of his observation was born out in my analysis of each individual's contribution to the study circle talk. Phil's transcript was by far the longest of the group. Since he was the director of the program, I felt it was helpful for him to be up front about his awareness that he could dominate learning situations. The group also mentioned that having me, as an outsider, facilitate the group helped change the dynamics of talking. The study circle format provided a situation for Phil to practice talking less and listening more, even though he did still talk a lot. One of Phil's observations when I gave the group a written sample of themes was that I had quotes from everyone, that everyone had something to offer.

Example of Assisted Self Observation Since Phil brought up his tendency to lecture, David took the opportunity to push Phil's self-reflection further.

David: Well, how did it feel for you, Phil? I mean, you said you thought you were dominating less. How did it feel?

Phil: Um, How did it feel that I was doing that?

David: Did it feel different to you? Did you feel like you were a different trainer?

Phil: Oh yeah, I mean I felt like I wasn't lecturing. I felt like, you know that people were talking to each other. The last training people really were, even by the third session, still talking to me and I was trying to break that down and I had a tough time doing it.

David: How did it feel?

Phil: You mean?

David: Did it feel different? Did it feel the way you thought it would?

Phil: Yeah, it felt much more comfortable to me. I mean, I feel very uncomfortable when I'm the focus, even in.

David: Focus?

Phil: Well, the thing is I feel uncomfortable because I figure I've probably done it and that wasn't what I set out to do.

David: So you were ready to change?

Phil: Oh, I've been ready to change for a long time. (laughter) That's not been the issue. The issue is figuring out how to do it. [teasing remark? and laughter] The last training I did was the first training I had done in about two years, and so I just sort of went in doing what I had done in the past and realized that that's what I was generating. Which is why I tried to do, work it out differently. [2:1:499]

Problem Solving

I labeled this type of talk problem solving because it is most evident when the group starts suggesting strategies to help someone solve an immediate problem. However, its characteristics seem to cover a broader range and this kind of talk indicates

an effort to improve practice in many ways. It is different from meaning making (which is discussed below) in that it focuses on an action that can be taken to solve a conflict, prevent a problem next time, get a job done, or move a group to a new level of learning. It doesn't necessarily look at root causes or explanations of the problem or behavior as much as it explores different strategies for dealing with the problem.

Sometimes meaning making and problem solving are interwoven in a discussion. These discussions are often some of the most profound learning experiences in the study circle because the inter-relationship of theory and practice are clearly evident. The following discussion about how to solve the problem of getting students to help keep the Greenfield site clean illustrates the problem solving process. It also illustrates how the underlying philosophy of The Literacy Project goes beyond book learning to service and responsibility both within the program itself and within the community where it is located.

1 Louise: You know we have two huge boxes for cans and I have been the
2 one who takes them every time and that's the money that we use for paper
3 cups and coffee cups and whatever kind of stuff which is fine, but I
4 decided, I'm not going to bring them back anymore. And if you notice, the
5 boxes are full again. I don't care, they can start going on the floor.

6 Phil: Well, do people understand that you're not doing it.

7 Louise: I have told people. Because people have said, oh there are a lot
8 of soda cans over there and I say yes, anybody interested in bringing them
9 over to Super Johns? All you gotta do is bag em up and take them over.
10 You just count them as you put them in the bag and you tell them how
11 many when you bring them over. It's about a 15 minute project. And they
12 just don't do it.

13 Phil: Do it as a math project. Figure out how much money. You might as
14 well throw them in the bag as they are counting.

Joan: Do people that take yours keep the money?

Michele: I don't know, this is another experience I recently had. I've never really believed in being really directive and I think it helps sometimes. (She tells a story of moving furniture with a friend who asked kids at tennis camp to help them with a futon and frame. She was surprised how willing they were.) All you have to do is ask.

Louise: I've done that. I've even put up a sign to clean up coffee area.

Michele: Confronting someone directly, individually.

Phil: You don't ask, you don't get.

Judy: [A student] does the recycling for us. I asked him the first time. Hey, you've got that big truck out there, do you know where to take this. And now it's his thing. He comes back and he counts out all the change. It gives him a sense of ownership. I've trusted him to do that. I've never had the experience of being turned down.

Alex: Asking someone directly vs putting a sign up.

Louise: People get ready to leave at night, I say "if you're soda can's empty you need to leave it in the box." They say it's not empty. So I say, you need to take it in the bathroom and pour it out then. I feel like I'm at home with a five or six-year-old. People have said things like this place is looking really a mess and I say I'll bring in a vacuum, who wants to vacuum. I had a volunteer who came in and vacuumed and cleaned the whole place because it was to the point we could not get anybody to do it. And I refuse to do it.

Judy: You know it's interesting. There's a group mentality, why am I going to do it if nobody else is going to do it? It's already an existing way and so it's trying to break that way vs the difference between starting out in a way and it's just what it. And so new people come in and see other people doing that and it just becomes more of the norm. Where it seems that the norm there is nobody else is putting their trash away and nobody else is doing it, so it kind of feeds upon itself. I'm just guessing.

Louise: I think that you're right. I think that one of the things that I have an issue with is I feel like people take and don't give back. Which is why this thing we're going to do in November, this national day of volunteerism it's like this is it, We're doing it. You guys are going to start

giving back. And so we're all going to do this together. And when I said it like that, it was like oh, O.K. What are we going to do? And we came up with who are we going to benefit? You now they're talking about the kind of things they're going to do. So I think well if I can get them to start doing that. You know people get a lot from the Literacy Project. They don't tend to give back. And when we mention it to them, even like to become a member or do the read-a-thon stuff, it's like don't mention it. But now, I'm really starting to have issue with that. Maybe the way to start that whole thing is like this is what we're going to do and hope it will take off and people will start being a little more willing to do that.

Joan: It seems like a nice idea to use some kind of event as the kick off of a new way of doing things. Here's are event - invite everyone in for the spring cleaning or something - the rearrange the furniture event to start the new way of doing things. [7:1:440-541]

Sharing and Analyzing Strategies

One of the key pieces of practice building is identifying successful strategies for facilitating the learning process. This way of talking is similar to problem solving in that it's purpose is to build practice. However, in problem solving, the group is trying to figure out what went wrong and how to avoid it next time. In strategy sharing, the group is trying to figure out what went right and how to replicate in another context or with another group. It is often as difficult to identify and articulate what went right as it is to figure out why things go wrong. The following examples illustrate how the interaction of study circle participants help each other identify and articulate what the key strategies are.

They might stop a story and ask for details when they are listening to a practice they would like to replicate in their site. The repetition and examination of certain strategies over time indicate the type of practice The Literacy Project is trying to promote. The following examples from two different sessions illustrate some of the

complexity involved in taking apart all of the pieces of a strategy. I use both "sharing" and "analyzing" to describe this kind of talk aimed at understanding each other's strategies. Sharing refers to when a person can already articulate clearly how they did something. Analyzing refers to when the group helps a person reconstruct what they and the students did in a series of events or activities that resulted in an interesting learning experience. The following two examples illustrate how the study circle group worked together to figure out how to engage students in discussions that led to community action. The Orange site was having the successes that the other sites wanted to replicate. The issue first came up when Pat described how a group of students became involved in a community food program.

Example From 4th Session

David: You mentioned that this grew out of classroom discussion. Could you tell me what you mean by classroom discussion?

Pat: Once in a while sort of towards the end of a class session. And I don't remember exactly how this came up, it was in November and I think it had to do with somebody wanting to talk about the coalition to rebuild our economy (we have a lot of people involved in things in the community.) It was one of those things that start in the last 20 minutes of class and it might have been around the time of a food distribution. Someone brought up that you can go to a food bank and stand in line and you got to go there so early and then there's no food left if you don't get there hours before the food distribution starts. A gentleman there who has four kids, applying for a food basket. And the grocery store closed. It was pretty much a free-for all. I didn't bring up the topic.

David: That's what I mean, when you say they wanted to talk about it, did somebody say "hey, I want to talk about this and did everyone say O.K.

Pat: no, you know how our site is set up, it has a top level and a bottom level. Sometimes, especially if people have been doing a lot of work, you know sort of academic things, you know the last 20 minutes we sort of

bring everyone together and I think the discussion actually started out, I initiated that we would talk about something that people had read recently and somebody said something about Thanksgiving and it just sort of came out of the discussion.

David: Do people know that the last 20 minutes everybody is going to get together and talk?

Pat: Sometimes. It really depends on who's there.

Phil: But you tried at one point to institutionalize it.

Pat: But I don't think we've really institutionalized it. Sometimes if we have a lot of people, it divides into two groups.

Joan: It sounds like when there is something to talk about though that it's there.

Pat: yeah,

David: It sounds to me like it depends on who's there.

Pat: To some extent I think so. Monday night discussions are more, but it really hasn't become institutionalized. And I just have mixed feelings about institutionalizing it.

Phil: sure

Kit: Do you feel that people know that it's built in as a possibility to have time. You can talk if you want to. But it doesn't make them talk. That's a wonderful idea.

Pat: Yeah, yeah.

Phil: Certainly most people aren't bashful.

Pat: If it's too quiet, that's when I intervene. Basically I bring it up around what have people been reading. So whatever direction they want it to go. That was sort of the context and I think that discussion grew out of people's real basic need. [3.8.569-644]

Example From 10th Session

Michele: . . . within the center there's a lot of group sort of stuff, people come together and they're excited if other people are there. But in terms of reaching out to the community, there isn't a lot. . .

Joan: It seems to me that there needs to be a period of time for building some solidarity within your organization at your site - people talking before you move out. At Orange, you've been doing class things for how long?

Pat: Two years. Also I think we certainly allow time during a session. We don't have, well, before I came to the site two years ago, there had been a student advisory committee that had been very hard to keep going as a special entity. [The previous teacher] had set it. I mean they did something. So one of the things I had observed that and John had observed that for a couple of months when it had been going. Was to do something that was a little more fluid in terms of that during a session, like when you've got ten people that are just there for a class to start some dialogue and conversation. I mean that's how we've gotten people to register to vote, cause somebody who was starting to register because they wanted to vote brought their motor sports car, take somebody else down who's newer. You know and sort of having that overlap of old people, people who continue and then are integrated into all these different sessions I think has really helped us. So then, I don't have to even initiate the conversation sometimes anymore. Sometimes I say, I don't even know what they're talking about. But it didn't start that way. I think it's a slow process. But the idea was to have some room in those individual sessions for that and just hey, let people, let it be a free-for-all, in some respects. We also had links with the Community Development Corporation that goes back, a year and a half, two years or even that sort of pushed people a little bit. In fact some of those people are still around. [8.6.379-411]

Meaning Making

Meaning making is one of the key points in the talking process where people attempt to articulate the theory. It is recognized in the transcript by the following characteristics. First, several people are contributing to the process. It is not a single person proposing their interpretation of an event, but it also not a question-answer or

short sentence exchange. Each person explains the connections they are trying to make in their mind. Second, the focus of the conversation is to find out why or to understand what is going on behind an observed event. It is a process of pulling theory out of an analysis of practice and concrete experience and putting together pieces of a practical theory. It is different from problem solving in that it works toward the explanation of an event or thing rather than the immediate solution of a problem. Third, it usually involves the juxtaposition and overlapping of more than one theme or perspective.

This overlapping of themes is very self-evident when you observe a color-coded page where theory building is taking place. The overlays of color are much more intense than in other places where the talk is more straight-forward. In the following example, the group was trying to make connections between the transitions of students in and out of learning groups, adult development, the social context of the literacy projects and teaching styles. Alex starts the process by taking the general theme of social context and placing it inside the group theme - groups within The Literacy Project become a new social context for learning. She then connects this idea with the theme of transitions. I then add in the teachers' role of creating the mini-subcontext of the group and the part the teacher plays in building bridges or stepping stones to help students make transitions to outside organizations. Phil then links back the individual and group needs and discusses the role the group plays for individuals at different times in their lives when they are making transitions. Judy finally summarizes what implications the emerging theory has for selecting a teaching style to deal with the individuals and groups they are working

with. On either side of this meaning-making discussion, David and Louise are talking about what to do with specific groups of students who are finishing their GED.

Alex: I'm struck by the social context stuff we did when we started with Joan and Sara way back and we did that whole sheet up here and everybody drew a picture and what we focused on almost exclusively, unless maybe I'm mistaken, was the individual factor stuff - the town or the job or the religion or the sort of values that individuals bring and we never really spent a lot of time on what then happened within the group. The big group itself gets those things and the group itself becomes a sub-context and that what's playing out in what everybody's saying is that the shift from people having (and this is sort of a gross overgeneralization) but sort of having one dimension and suddenly they've added this group dimension, and now they're having to sort out a balancing act between themselves, the group and this outside you know, family life, values, religion and so forth and that this whole idea of the group over time and what is the role of the group and the process that the individual wants and stuff like that. And everybody here has talked about the same dynamic and Judy mentioned making that stuff explicit and saying what has happened here, we've all been individuals, but now there's this connection - how do we explain that? And then taking that one step further and doing the transition stuff out, you know what does it look like now the group is dissolving, or it's changed, or some of us have our GED, some of us still have a test. And that whole making that explicit because that clearly is one of the social contexts that's going on and then make everything else explicit like who are you, where do you come from, what do you believe in, and stuff like that. This group piece is going somewhat unsaid for everybody, yet it's clearly a real dynamic.

Joan: That reminds me of another thing from way back, that is when we brought out that curriculum is, one way to define it, is creating the context where people can learn. And that the groups, these ongoing group things are part of the learning context which you are helping to create and the members of the group are helping to create. And how that mini sub-context (which is a good way to describe it) changes over time. That context helps them interact with the library, the transportation department in kind of a particular way. And like completing the GED is moving out of that context back to being an individual. There is this whole range of interesting things that are what you are doing with your subcontext.

Phil: Well did they,

Joan: But if you abstract the process of individuals coming together and forming a group and the dynamics of a group, then you provide people with a model that might sustain them a little bit more when they get back outside. And what you were talking about not being so isolated, people interacting in the library, being less sad than people going back to the same job and the same routine and so forth. It feels to me like it really needs to be an explicit kind of thing,

Pat um hum, umhum.

Joan: We need to say, look what we have all done and what we've created and it's a function of both what you brought, but what everybody else has brought. That doesn't just happen in this room, it doesn't just happen in this. It can happen anywhere.

Phil: The other thing about group stuff that makes it real interesting if you think about the developmental stuff that we've talked about. (As this group keeps changing, there are some people who know about this stuff and some people who don't.) But just, groups play a different role for people at different stages. And if you're talking about people who are starting at stage three at the very conventional group centered stage, then the group's a very comfortable place to be in. And moving out of the group is very important for them, because that's growth. If you're starting at delta the stage before that, then the group is what they need to move into in order to develop. So you've got very different ways of using groups. And it's not that you can't use and belong to a group at any stage. I mean obviously you can and we all do. But you use it in different ways. And so what happens with a particular group may also have to do with where people are starting from and what they need to do in order to develop. You know, so people may in fact be leaving a group and taking all kinds of stuff with them that they can use and other people may be leaving a group and they're not ready to leave it yet. You know and so for them it's going to be more difficult to carry over what they've seen and what they're going to do is look for another group in order to continue the learning that they need to do to get to the point where they can leave. You know so there's all kinds of different things that can happen in that context.

Judy: That's right and that your teaching style will change as well depending on what place you feel most of the group members are.

Phil: Ideally, yes.

74 Judy: So in the beginning, you really might be more directive, and then
75 after a year right now, it's really letting go and yet not yet sure if you can
76 let go and you know they have the experience to run it, but do you still
77 need to be a little bit more directive and still let the [pause] It does shift
78 over time. [5:2:247-324]

Topic Discussion

This type of talk usually centered around discussions of reading assignments and evaluation of the study circle process. Sometimes theories or themes from the study circle were the topic under discussion, however, there was a difference in how these themes were discussed depending on if they were emerging from meaning making talk or if they were introduced as the topic of the day. For example, social context was the topic of the study circle. In the early session, the group spent more time addressing the topic of the study circle and referring to the readings. Later on, social context became more of an underlying issue embedded in each of the themes that were being analyzed through stories, problem solving and other kinds of talk.

Topic discussion draws on classroom experience in a more general way. It seems to serve as a basis for more global theories rather than small scale meaning making. It was connected to the written syllabus and scheduled evaluation: what was your response to the readings? what are you going to focus on for your project? what do you think of these themes which have been identified in the study circle so far? The other kinds of talk were connected to the living syllabus that evolved out of people's current frames of mind. The following example came from the second session when social context was still a front of the agenda topic.

Sara: Are there other comments that people have about things that rang a bell either from other people's experiences or from the reading?

Judy: Well I was just going to say Alex raised the question of wanting a working definition of social context - And I was wondering if . . . Would that be helpful?

Pat: Yeah, I think it would because one of the questions I had when I read, cause I think there's a lot in this reading . . . I think there are all these layers. I mean if we talk about social context in the classroom and this has come up here. But then there's all the other. So how do you get sort of a definition of social context?

Phil: I think you can define it. I think what you're saying is that you have to remember that it applies in a whole lot of different ways. I mean if you're talking about social context, you have to look at the social context of the people who are writing this stuff, as well, because they're coming at it with certain assumptions that in some cases, I think are total bullshit, you know, that don't make sense to me. And I know that those are the assumptions. I can see that. Can they see it? I don't know. So I think you're talking about those kinds of layers. Is that what you were?

Pat: Yeah, right, right. And even as we look at, say, our classroom and what we do, certainly a certain social context builds and grows. Then as sort of new people come in or something, they're bringing whatever social context they're from. I mean that's like that whole thing about assumptions about what school is.

Phil: Sure and those things get mixed. Which broadens perspective, but also occasionally makes for really volatile compounds.

David: I think one thing from the article that has raised a question in my mind is she spends time talking about, I think, literacy practices which people actually do. And that's something I've always been curious about in a way, about students. You know they go away and then they come back and they still want to, you know, and they have their various things, their various reading and writing tasks they have to do in the classroom. And what is the relationship between what they do in the classroom around reading and writing and what they do at home or wherever it is? Cause I don't know. And I've never, you know, I guess I've asked students here and there, but I haven't done it in a formal way of having students look at what they do at home. So it just remains a question in my mind. And if I did know, how would that affect what we did in the classroom?

38 And how much do students need to re-examine the relationship between
39 what they do at home and what they do at school. My suspicion is that
40 they do very little at home compared to what they do in school or certainly
41 that they feel like they do very little at home compared to what they do at
42 school.

43 Phil: Yeah, that's very different from that.

44 Alex: For me that was the piece, that whole thing about discovering that
45 and stuff. And Portia, the very early quote of her saying, you know I did
46 these letters, but I can't read and I can't write. That you can't even just step
47 in and ask them, "what literacy activities or practices do you do outside?"
48 You have to like bring them back, like I mean it's that question that Judy
49 and then Pat spoke to about needing to be, and you initiated it about being
50 able to get outside and re-examine what you define as a literacy practice.
51 The unpeeling, going backwards in onion-layers of social context.
52 [1.26.034-129]

Combinations of Talk Used in Building Theory and Practice

Although interesting insights about the Study Circle and The Literacy Project can be gained by looking at examples of each type of talk in isolation, to really understand how the Study Circle Support Group operates as a place for The Literacy Project staff to develop their theory and practice, you have to look at how the various types of talk are interconnected in a study circle session.

As stated above, theory building and practice building are the main goals of the study circle support group. However, these two activities are not types of talk in and of themselves. They cannot exist in isolation; they are combined forms. On one level, it is possible to categorize some of the types of talk into either theory building or practice building. For example, meaning making and hypothesis forming are clearly part of theory building. In the same way, problem solving, self observation and strategy analysis are clearly part of practice building. But in the transcripts of the sessions, theories are

not built merely from hypothesis and meaning making attempts. The theories as well as the practice are developed simultaneously drawing upon all of the categories of talk.

For example, in the previous example for meaning making (section "f" above), I mentioned that the quoted example was preceded and followed by David and Louise talking about real students who were completing their GED and getting ready to make the next transition. While the effort to build theory quoted in the meaning making section is interesting and useful, the theory is not complete without the corresponding stories from practice. And the stories are not complete without the interwoven efforts to make sense of them and to solve real problems.

The moments when a theory actually gets spoken (meaning making) or a correct practice is identified (problem solving) come within a circuitous and interwoven process of a discussion that includes story telling, hypothesis formation, self observation, strategy sharing and topic discussion. In fact the words used to describe the theories themselves often are meaningless without the supporting stories and observations based in practice. I use the term theory building and practice building to describe the interwoven combinations of talk that move the group toward a common vision of who they are and what they do.

Within the interwoven combinations of talk, there seems to be several characteristic patterns that the group uses to build theory and practice. 1) Coming to a shared vision of the issue being discussed and the hypothesis being tested: In many cases hypothesis formation alternates with story-telling, theory-building attempts and problem solving suggestions in a circular effort to identify the right foundation from which to

build the appropriate theory and practice. 2) Working with theory embedded in context and practice: Stories and observations are shared before and after a theory is articulated. And often the words used to describe a theory have no meaning without the concrete examples from practice. 3) Leaving the theory and practice discussion open-ended and somewhat inconclusive: The theory and solutions for practice are not necessarily labeled or highlighted by conversation. Profound insights are not given overt recognition by the group. Because the group does not come to a consensus on what is the theory or practice, they do not come up with a clear label for what it is and how they are using it. Therefore, each person uses their own unspoken theory in their practice and the group consensus is not visible. The following examples from the transcripts will illustrate how combinations of talk form these characteristic patterns.

Coming to a Shared Vision of an Issue

John raises a question about how to work with students who undervalue their abilities. The recording was bad, but he was also having difficulty finding the words to describe what he was trying to understand and work on.

> John: The question I have, I keep putting it off. It seems to hard. The idea of, that frustrates me the most. It seems that students undervalue and don't have high opinions of their talents and abilities and their daily experience. Even writing a dialogue journal [something being torn and tape-recorder being jostled.] I don't see them. I see them looking for education outside of them. [hard to hear] it's so varied that that piece can't get back into the [public?] Almost like the key to success is outside of their experience. [sentence unintelligible] I would love to try something [cut off, can't hear] it's scary I don't know if they, like mapping.

I pick up on figuring out his idea for a mapping activity in class to solve the problem and share a past teaching experience (problem-solving and story telling)

> Joan: With the students?

John: Yes, sort of lay down, the students map their environment and then maybe adding something. Like adding success to the picture or adding education to the picture. Can mapping bring all these things together?

Joan: I think, you know taking the idea of having them do visually the different aspects of their life. That moves you outside of the educational context where they don't feel like they have any success. So, if you say draw a map of your life, put your home, do you go hunting, do you belong to a club. That it gives you insights into other areas where they have success. I mean, what I'm thinking of is I gained a great aha experience when I was teaching Jr. High and I went to watch the school basketball team one day. And I saw the kids who didn't do, one kid in particular who did not do well in my English class was the star of the team. And not only the skilled shooter, but a real leader in terms of bringing the group together. And all of a sudden, I went Koonk. Just because you're not successful in English does not mean you're not successful in life. And I started looking at my students as more whole human beings than as a student in an English class. And especially in a situation where you're feeling. You've got them in an education experience. And of course, they feel undervalued and ineffective. So using some kind of map thing might clue you into, "oh this person raises horses, or this person has a baby." Something

Phil and David back up to clarify the issue John raised.

Phil: But I think what John's trying to say is not that he doesn't know that stuff, so much as that they don't know it.

David: Right.

Phil: That they don't see that the stuff they're doing in the rest of their lives

Joan: But what I'm saying is it gives you a clue to bring those things into your activities. That once you sort of see - Getting them to focus on that or say you learned very well to drive a car or build a house or something else. Make the transfer. But getting them talking about, writing about, exploring the various aspects of their life that they do have success. So that you then redefine education. What I'm trying to say is, it gives you some clues of things you can tap for them.

John describes the problem in more detail by describing things he has tried in the past that didn't work very well. (story telling)

John: It's very difficult for me though. Like Jim Johnson, you know Jim Johnson.

Phil: Sure.

John: He wrote a paper on the train travel. He went to high school in Gardner.

Phil: He wrote that thing that went into the what do you call it? About riding train to school. yeah.

John: And every time I see an article about transportation in New England or trains in New England, I show it to him. He just takes it. He won't look at. I find that quite often. I tend to assume that maybe they don't put as high a value on their experience as they should.

Phil interprets what he thinks might be the internal feeling of the student (hypothesis formation)

Phil: I don't know. Well, it's always the stuff you do is familiar, so it can't be worth anything.

I verify Phil's interpretation with a similar example I've observed from doing staff development with literacy teachers.

Joan: I'm just a teacher in this class and that person who wrote the article knows more that I do. But they're writing things that are just common sense.

Phil: Of course.

Sara verifies Phil's interpretation with her personal experience. (story telling)

Sara: I find that when I'm trying to write stuff, if I'm thinking about like journal articles or anything big, try to do, I get immobilized because everything that I'm thinking, everything I'm doing feels so intuitive and feels like things that everybody knows. That it's hard for me to pull out parts of my experience that would be valuable to someone else. And that's hard to do, to validate your own knowledge and realize that there's stuff there to share with other people, that's valuable.

Judy expands the interpretation to a societal issue rather than an issue for literacy students and Phil expands that interpretation to an educational issue. (hypothesis formation)

> Judy: Yeah, it sounds like what we're struggling with is a societal thing, where education's a thing where [can't hear], it's so incredible . . pick up??
>
> Phil: Or not even that it's valued that education is status. Education leads to status. You know and since I'm never going to have any status, obviously this is outside my realm.

John brings the analysis of society back to the students who are failed by the educational system.

> John: If they went through school with the understanding that they couldn't get a good grade in school, they're never going to get graded well outside of school. How do you break that down, isn't that a lot what we're trying to do?
>
> Phil: Sure, and well also, well, I'm sorry, go ahead.

David refers back to John's original question and proposed activity and clarifies what he sees as John's objective. (problem -solving)

> David: That is your, I was going to ask you before what you saw as the objective of that particular activity and it sounds like you just stated it - it's a matter of trying to break whatever bounds the past might have. The question might be, well think about your past, and you know, your past in relation to your present or you know in relation to your future and how what's been determined and what hasn't been determined. Surprises and changes and I don't know.

I go back to problem solving and suggest another way to approach the activity.

> Joan: What about addressing the issue directly in terms of success - having people write about successful people they know personally or some successful people they've heard about. And what's the difference or
>
> Phil: Or what is success.
>
> Joan: y y yeah.

Judy shares an example from her class that is the same issue that John is talking about. (story-telling)

Judy: I find, if I can piggyback. I found that in the Women's Writing group, that this [unclear] nothing. I did this beautiful dididuda that you can stick in the museum, but that's not going to be effective, right.

Phil: Right.

Judy: And however, they can see it in each other. I can't see it in me, but Mary, you know, you're this amazing cook and you do this, and they're complimenting, the dynamics quite different in that class. And they're going all the time. So maybe somehow like saying wow, if you know that your friend over here is really good at that, somehow, I don't know. If you can see it already in another person, it's just something more to get it coming back somehow to self. So it's not like totally absent. I would wager it's more how I view self that's really so involved. That I can see those same skills in somebody else and that's great, you're great. I'm not saying you're a failure because you didn't finish school.

Phil draws the connection from Judy's story and proposes that the issue is having control in your life. (hypothesis formation)

Phil: Well it's, it's the issue. It's what we're always talking about. It's that control issue. It's, you know, not really believing that anything you do has any effect on the world. Therefore, I can't possibly do anything that's going to affect my life. You know, education is something that clearly people use to get from one place in their lives to another, I can't do that. Other people know how to do that. I don't know how to do that, I don't have that skill. And I'll never have it.

Joan: Can you, go ahead and finish.

Phil: Well, I'm basically finished.

I go back to problem solving based on the new hypothesis and John's comment about how students feel about poor grades and suggest another class activity.

Joan: I was just thinking too, the whole symbolism of school as the one place in life where we are graded, very explicitly graded on performance. And taking the issue of grade. One thing that was helpful for me moving from a person being graded to a person being responsible to grade, and learning, oh a very subjective kind of a thing. There's all these kinds of

guesses. That you may want to look at talking about school experiences or whatever where they were judged and ranked. But also moving onto another thing. O.K., let's look at famous political leaders in the United States or different, you know people. Let's grade them. Let's grade the president and the congress.

Phil: I've been doing that all my adult life, it doesn't matter. They don't pay any attention.

Joan: No, but just to put them into having the experience

Phil: nah, I'm just teasing.

Joan: of going through those criteria and say, demystifying that process.

Sara describes an experience in a class she took that was similar to the activity I was proposing. (story telling)

Sara: We did that in the Evaluation Class, You were in that class last year, yeah. The very first day, he asked us to brainstorm, to think about a time when we had been evaluated and then to think about times when we had evaluated others and to think about how it felt to be in both positions.

John relates the idea to his student's experiences.

John: Grades never, I mean where I went to school, grades were never explained to us. They probably still aren't. But I think of students when they first come in when they discover how to grade their own paper, like putting the number correct over the number of the sample and coming up with a percentage. And they thought that was wonderful.

Phil: Cause they'd never.

John: Like Jim Johnson, he asked a teacher once how did they get to that figure and he never got an answer. And he was so mystery - right and wrong. And he felt terrific.

Phil: Being able to just do it, to have that much control over it.

John: To correct his own paper.

I make the connections of talking about grading to portfolio assessment. Judy and Sara suggest other aspects that can also be evaluated.

Joan: You know of a sampling of portfolio of writing, and looking and comparing to each other. That whole process of how you, you know if you wanted to grade someone, what kinds of criteria do you want to set up? And what will you do and recognizing that each person, we do it informally of each other all the time. But also in school, it's very explicit. You say, O.K. we'll collect spelling tests and they're only worth ten points, and writing is going to be worth 100 points because it's harder to do and takes more work. But then how do I know that this writing is better than that writing. I think this whole use of portfolio assessment and involving students in that process is that underlying idea of evaluating self and others. And not always feeling that you're the victim of someone else's evaluation. Which can come from school experience

Judy: GED

Joan: or family experience or GED. You know there's a whole, even looking at the whole thing of how the GED is scored could be interesting.

Sara: But I think you have to keep going back to, as you said, the larger context of what their other lives are and other parts of their lives. I mean, I'm just imagining an activity where you'd have each person sort of identifying certain areas of their life, one of them being writing or the classroom and another one being basketball and another one being their love life or whatever, well that's probably a bad one. (laughter)

Phil: Right, well, I used to be with.

Sara explains her idea and gives an example from her experience. She proposes a new hypothesis about why students evaluate themselves negatively which David builds on.

Sara: But I mean, force people to look at the different areas of their life and find places where they feel successful. My experience sometimes has been, students who see themselves as poor students, put themselves in that role when they come in, even though they don't really, even though they do have fairly high self-esteem. Since they feel like they aren't supposed to have high self-esteem in that context, they turn it off,

David: yes,

Sara: or they act it out. They have low self-esteem.

David: If you talk with some critics, they don't know how to evaluate themselves, or they've been trained to evaluate themselves by being evaluated negatively by other people.

Sara: Even though you can see that inside they have pride that comes from other places.

[several people talking at once]

Phil questions the hypothesis and presents his observation of students in program.

Phil: I know, but it's the transfer is the issue. The thing is, my guess is that a lot of the folks you're talking about, don't have that pride. That you know, a lot of the folks we see in Orange are people who really do feel pretty worthless. You know and it's very hard breaking through that.

Judy and John give examples from their programs. (story telling)

Judy: Yeah, I know this woman who has this thing about I wish I could help. I wish I could to (unclear) And she is forever doing stuff, I mean forever, she does this all the time. She's an incredible giver. And she says, I wish I could help. I don't have the skills to help. I can't help.

Phil: Yeah, I can't be Martin Luther King, so it's not good enough.

John: A woman told me once that she can't remember when she wasn't called stupid. [something I can't hear] That wasn't her name, it was stupid. The landlord that makes deals with her, sex for rent [this isn't complete, can't hear what he's saying]

Judy looks at the issue from another angle with a new story. (story telling)

Judy: I had an experience, two nights ago a group of students were having dinner. There was this woman who does this amazing needlework that she's been doing since she was six or seven. And she started pulling out things she made when she was six or seven. All of us were laughing. I mean at six or seven, I couldn't even keep my crayon between the lines, much less be doing cross-stitch. We're talking about really masterpiece type of work,

Phil: Serious stuff.

Judy: And so I made this joke that I at the age of six or seven couldn't even keep my crayon between the lines. And another woman corrected me, and said did you ever see those pictures? And I go no. And she said, I bet if right now, you looked back at them, that even though you were outside the lines, you would really like them, because that's a part of you. And I was just like, good for you, that was an amazing thing.

Phil verifies the new insight with his own personal experience. (story telling)

Phil: But that the other thing is that we are, you know, our memories of that kind of stuff which goes into exactly what John is talking about are sometimes very different from reality. I remember when I had kids, I found out all sorts of things about myself from my parents that I had not known. You know one of my kids was doing a jigsaw puzzle at age two or three and I was thinking he was really good at puzzles. And my father said, well that's not surprising, you were amazing at puzzles when you were a little kid. I remember struggling with puzzles. I remember them being really hard and always being down on myself for not being able to do them. (laughter) And my father was saying, gee, for a little kid you were incredible. You know it's like, wait a minute.

David: Hearing from somebody else, you know something which can be valuable. Because now you really believe that you were very good at puzzles.

Phil questions whether students will have the same opportunity for belated positive feedback that he had.

Phil: And of course, what I understand is that my perspective is from, you know I was comparing myself to something entirely different. And you know that's in a lot of cases, the kind of situation that these folks have been in as well. You know, but they don't know that and they're never going to hear that is the problem. you know if it is true.

David: They're never going to hear what?

Phil: they're never going to hear, "oh actually, you were very good at that. You know or actually you know you weren't such a bad reader. You know it's just that you needed some time." You know your second grade teacher saying, well really, I was just trying to get you motivated by telling you that you weren't doing very well, or something. It's that kind of thing. It may have been the totally wrong thing to do. But, that might

John draws things back to another variation of his original question and people respond with their opinions.

John: The place within them where they can tell themselves that. Is that totally out of commission?

Phil: No, I don't think it's, well it depends what you mean.

Judy: I would say with the majority, definitely not. With some people.

Joan: And it will all take varying degrees of time and support to get it back in.

Phil: Yeah, it's something that's not going to happen because of a flash of insight. I think it's fair to say that. But it doesn't mean it can't happen.

David returns to questions John originally raised and attempts to clarify issue we are discussing. (hypothesis building)

David: My question to what you originally said is, I heard you saying that "people don't see their school or their education as a part of themselves." Did you say that?

John: Yeah, but the key is that, I think they visualize the key of success as being outside their own experience. Almost like education is out there. Like a piece of a puzzle, but maybe they don't see as even fitting in.

Phil: So even if they get a GED, it's still something that's beyond their reach kind of thing.

John: Right.

Judy proposes another way to organize a classroom activity based on the most recent formation of the hypothesis. Phil and I join in defining the activity. (problem solving)

Judy: I was just thinking if you did like trains and transportation stuff. I mean like get it outside of we're not talking about you, Jim, you're talking about, you know drawing a picture, here's a student, you know, whatever. And this is a story, it doesn't feel interesting, whatever. And having people talk about that experience. Now he doesn't feel dadudadu, describe kind of what you're seeing there. Have a series of questions like, what do you guys think about this person? What would you do?

Phil: oh right, yeah.

Judy: How would you describe this person's life? Do you think this person's feeling anything? What advice would you give this person? What do you think this person could do to feel better about himself? Do you think there's hope for this person? Why do you think this person feels like this? Where does that come from? You know like that. And then it's a way, a safe way to reflect.

Phil: But then, in some way over time the connection has to be made between that discussion and, I mean, people may you know on some level, understand that yes I feel like this too. And yet at some time, there's got to be a connection that's made there.

Joan: So maybe that would be the next thing, do you ever feel this way. Have you had similar experiences? What did you do? What could you do?

Judy: I remember seeing this once, like a picture of a graduate student, like clutching that book and like super stressed out shoulders sitting there. And it was like 3:00 in the morning, and the person's skinny and you know sweat, whatever. And we did that in a graduate class. And it was amazing what came out because all of us were talking about I definitely feel that way, and being able to look at why, why. Where does this come from? Is it because I'm self-abusive? Is it because of the system? Why? It was very helpful actually.

John picks up on the idea and makes a connection to his experience. (problem-solving and story-telling)

John: I need to learn some steps. Is she saying like yesterday a student came in and he was all covered with grease and I was clean, and he felt really embarrassed and apologetic.

Phil: Yeah, George didn't want to come to the orientation cause he was wearing dungarees and I said, what?

John: And I assumed, cause he really acted almost like this, like almost like cowering. And he'd bought a car and bought a part and had to fix it. I had a feeling that maybe he thought what I was doing was superior to what he was doing.

Phil: Higher status sure.

John: But he actually fixed his car so he could get his wife to the doctor which is, what could be more important?

Phil: of course, yes.

John: But no matter how much I said about, asking him about the car and what he worked on, and I don't think I ever really brought him up much.

David: But you're what you were saying, get it out, get it out and what Phil said, bring it back.

Phil reminds the group of the reality of how long change takes, that one classroom activity, no matter how good, will not instantly change a person's self-perception.

Phil: But the other thing, is that that's - you're talking about a process. You're not talking about you're going to say something and he's going to say "oh, O.K., it's all right." You know, that's not going to happen. I mean, you're going to say something now and tomorrow and the next day and the next day and six months from now, the guy might come in not feeling bad because he's got grease on his hands. (laughter) Great John.

Dave supports Phil's observation and describes his own experience. (story-telling)

David: I think that's great. I mean, I think that means a lot to me. I think a lot of times the way the Northampton class works, that's what I was trying to do and it worked for some people.

Phil: You want it to happen right then kind of thing?

David: Well at least that's the way I did it. I give people positive feedback, encouragement day after day after day after day on an individual basis. I'd say, "No, but what you're doing is good." and they'd come back the next day and I'd say, "no, but what you're doing is good." I did that for two years you know, and there may be some change. The people who want that, you know, will take it. But if there is a different process, I think like people have mentioned. Like maybe if you do it in a group or you get a picture and you talk about something in the abstract or in an objective way. You know and bring it back and sort of step by step, you have a next step, how does this relate to yourself? That the ability to think critically about the issue may come about faster than, you know, somebody just getting that little emotional, or that little, you know direct little plug in positive feedback everyday like a habit.

John reflects on what he is going to do and weighs the different benefits between on-going positive reinforcement and a specific activity.

> John: It seems some kind of visualization or a map might give more ownership to it than what I say.
>
> Judy: um hum, um hum.
>
> John: I'm just trying to think of some way of speeding up the process so that it comes from within them.

I make some final observations about how the activity might work differently for different people. (summary of the meaning-making and problem-solving that has been going on throughout the discussion)

> Joan: You might think in terms of structuring a theory discussion and then writing activity into your classroom where you deal with it. One time having people do mapping and talking about different aspects of their lives, or making graphs or charts or writing about something where they were praised by someone or whatever. And then just sort of using that as your focus for this class. Getting to know and helping students get to know the other aspects of things in their lives where they can learn to give reinforcement. Cause I think what you're saying is right, having them do it whether it's writing about it or picturing it or discussing something pushes them into the process of analyzing. And you can do series of activities and watch and see how different people respond. And some people may respond very quickly and others may be slower. And it's something to do with the rest of the context of their lives, what they've been through in the past that's going to have an influence. But I think you really could bring those kinds of things in and do it in the context of whatever classroom. You know if it's GED, maybe demystifying some things about grading and being judged can fit into talking about how they are going to be graded on the GED test. Or doing something with a picture like she described of someone being afraid of the GED test and getting them to talk about why and what other experiences. [2:2:274-590]

While this excerpt from the transcript is very long, it serves to demonstrate that not only are problems difficult to solve, they are also difficult to describe and it is not really possible to suggest solutions until there is a common understanding of the nature of the problem. Participants drew on stories from literacy classes, informal get-togethers,

childhood, formal school teaching, graduate school experiences and staff development experiences to create a shared vision of what self-esteem means in the human experience in general and the adult literacy class in particular. This discussion to build a common vision is but one piece in an on-going process of trying things out at the program site, discussing the problem with learners and other teachers and revisiting the issue from time to time in the study circle. The theory evolves in tandem with the development of practice and solutions.

Working with Theory Embedded in Context and Practice:

One of the difficulties I faced in analyzing the transcripts was identifying the theories which were implicit in how literacy education was done at The Literacy Project. At first, I was disappointed that I couldn't find any quotable quotes when I reviewed transcripts to find those wonderful insights that I remembered from the study circle sessions. As I combed through sections of discussion where I knew something important had been stated I became more and more aware that the theory or insight was something that I had intuited between listening to stories and partially formed sentences describing hypotheses, solutions and theories.

This phenomenon of the key insights being implicit in and intuited from fragmentary phrases, stories and metaphors is probably the most significant difference between oral and written inquiry. In writing, we spend time to choose the right words to convey. In speaking, we can put out half of the words or part of an idea and the listeners will fill in the gaps or help us define the concept. One of my favorite phrases, that I came across when I was looking for that quotable quote on how people at The Literacy

Project describe their participatory curriculum process, came from Louise's story describing her experience trying to answer questions about how The Literacy Project operated for a group of teachers in Springfield. She realized that they were asking the same kinds of questions that she used to ask when she first started.

> Louise: Do you remember when we first started doing staff development? It was like none of us were convinced that we knew what we were doing. That's what we were looking for. We were looking for this kind of like formula that was gonna - this is how we do it, we do this, this and this and then it happens. And we finally came to the realization two years later that we sort of did know what we were doing. And it wasn't a this, this and this. It was sort of a "do this and then hopefully the other, you just sort of have to go from there." [5:1:281]

"Do this and then hopefully the other, you just sort of have to go from there" does not sound like a very complete or profound theory of teaching. However, even if we would not choose to use those exact words in a written document, the phrase does carry a lot of meaning in the spoken context of the study circle. Everyone knew what it meant and that it was very different from its opposite: "do this, this, and this and then it happens." It is difficult to compile summaries or step-by-step formulas for every successful teaching moment. But an analysis of the stories and experiences shared throughout all the study circle sessions reveals that people were asking each other "what did you do?, what happened? and how did you go from there?"

Phil followed Louise's quote by summarizing, "it just sort of evolves" and commenting, "David has completely changed what he is doing and that's going to continue to evolve. The next class you run will be different from this one and that's as it should be" [5:1:281]. In the same session, David introduced a story about what was

going on in his class with another way of saying "do this and then hopefully the other, you just have to go from there."

> David: One of the things I've been thinking about as everybody's been talking. Right now it's hard for me to separate, or even to say this is what I'm doing because in a way, my experience has been when students are in a group, they end up taking over what happens, so now certain things have developed, certain things have happened that I did not foresee. The students were on the front page of the Gazette yesterday talking about the loss of bussing to this transportation director in Northampton. The whole thing started, I think, because we were modeling writing to our town officials in the class and one woman said I want to write about this bussing issue. [5:1:599]

Later on in the session, Louise illustrated her own "theory" by discussing how she was facing a current dilemma with students in her current GED class changing their focus.

> When it first started happening, I really struggled with, oh my gosh, I need to keep this group together because we've put, well you know, you set a goal: you're going to start here and your going to finish 20 weeks into it or whatever, however long and it's going to do this, this and this. That doesn't allow for like the human factor. And it's wonderful, these people are getting confidence. In the beginning three of these women would, the only reason was because there wasn't going to be other people and there weren't going to be men. And now these women, are coming in at night when there's all men. And so, you know there's some growth there and all that. So I know that it's a good thing. But it's like, did I look at teaching as a group? Well, then this what you're going to face because the group is going to change. It's going constantly evolve. I think that's a real. I mean now I look at it as it's a really good thing. [5:1:117]

You do this, and you may even try to follow a plan to do this, this, and this, and then hopefully what you expect will happen, but if it doesn't, then "you just have to go from there." This tentativeness of planning, whether it applies to creating a context for learning or organizing a learning activity has been described in several of the themes.

The point I want to make here is that the in spite of their fragmented nature, theories implied or spoken in the study circle discussion have a different kind of usefulness because they stay embedded in their context. The theory is not the single phrase, it is the whole discussion, stories and all.

The Oxford English Dictionary gives one definition of theory as "a conception or mental scheme of something to be done, or the method of doing it; a systematic statement of rules or principles to be followed" (1971, p. 3284). Most of the theories and models of staff development, indeed of educational research in general, strive to provide systematic statements of generalized rules and principles. But in analyzing how theory is expressed in the dialogue of a study circle, it makes more sense to think of it as a conception of something to be done, a collaborative mental scheme that draws on multiple perspectives, examples, ideas and hunches that indicate a new direction or something to try next. Obviously, such a definition of theory not only neglects to put the principles in a step-by-step order, it also leaves the emerging theory in an unfinished state anticipating the results of the next effort to put ideas into practice.

In Feldman's (1994b) study of physics teachers engaged in collaborative action research, he argues that the understanding and practical wisdom of practitioners are developed intuitively through deep involvement and analysis in their educational situations. Such embeddedness in the situation means that generalizability and transfer take place more effectively when practitioners make their understanding public through sharing their experiences, stories and insights through a variety of mechanisms rather than systematizing a set of general rules or principles. There is always the consciousness

that every educational situation is different and has the possibility of developing in its own unique direction. He draws upon Sanders and McCutcheon's (1986) definition of practical theories as "guidelines or rules-of-thumb used to guide behavior and provide reasons for actions in response to practical problems. Since practical problems are context-bound, any practical theory must be mutable, indeterminate, and particular" (Feldman, 1994b, p. 6). This leads us to the final characteristic pattern of talk in the study circle process.

Leaving the Theory and Practice Discussion Open-Ended

In reviewing the discussion of self-esteem in the transcript excerpt examined earlier, it is clear that the group did not come up with either a conclusive description of the problem John was raising, nor a definitive suggestion for what he should try. However, it was implicitly understood that we had all deepened our own understanding of the problem and that John and others were going to continue working on the issue in their classrooms. The theme reappeared several times in the study circle sessions and in had been a topic of discussion at The Literacy Project in past staff development activities. In fact it was included in the mission statement of the organization. The issue of how to facilitate personal growth and development must be readdressed with each new student who comes to the program. Once the theory and practice is defined and refined with one group, the process seems to start over again with a new group.

I think it is both a strength and weakness of oral inquiry that the discussion is on-going. Not taking the time to pin down the principles in writing leaves them vague and often unrecognized for how powerful or insightful they really are. On the other hand, not

naming something explicitly allows for all sorts of new tangents and perspectives to be connected while moving in a general direction. David stated the issue quite eloquently in the final evaluation when Phil asked if we could say that the study circle process was an effort to define the philosophy of the program.

> David: I mean now that I think about it, I think we each have to do that when we have our conversations. You, every now and then you'll say something, "well I think this is more sort of the way we're going." Things that you will say will sort of provide a perspective which is more overarching in saying this is the direction that we are moving in and I think that we should be moving in. And I think that we all sort of tacitly agree with that. You know and it gets, call it community development or whatever it is. Everybody's comfortable or uncomfortable with certain words. Because I think it's almost like superstitious not to put a name on it, because I think we all recognize that it sort of has to happen in and of itself. It's like telling students what they want to do versus letting them discover it themselves. We don't want to put a label on something which we know can happen if we set things up right. [9:1:542+]

Uses and Issues around Text in the Study Circle

It is ironic that in a study on the social context of literacy, reading and writing tasks turned out to be the most problematic issue for us to deal with. This section briefly examines the responses of the study circle participants to reading and writing assignments. It also includes a discussion of how to better incorporate the use and creation of texts into future study circles.

Responses to Assigned Readings

One of the challenges in organizing the study circle was to find appropriate reading material on the social context of literacy. While there were a number of interesting articles, they were written for an academic rather than a practitioner audience. But even more problematic, there was nothing that fit exactly the type of process we

were trying to facilitate with our syllabus. Nevertheless, we selected a set of readings and matched them up with the various sessions.

From the beginning, we had mixed feelings about the readings. Everyone read some, but not all of the articles. Feelings toward the readings ranged from acknowledging usefulness of new ideas and perspectives, to guilt for not reading, to intimidation and exasperation. Probably the interesting way to reflect on the readings is to look them in juxtaposition to experience sharing.

The first time a reading came up naturally in the discussion, the group had been talking about teaching styles, leadership, democratic processes and the power of information in response to a very funny experience Judy related about trying to get a guest speaker to come to her class and answer questions about alcohol and drug abuse which the students had raised in the course of their personal study and writing. The group made several jokes and comments about how people gain power by controlling information and knowledge. Then Phil commented "That really ties into the Street article." Judy responded by saying, "I didn't read the Street article," and the rest of the group mumbled similar confessions. There was a long silence and the discussion ended. Phil didn't go on to explain the article. In a sense the group had already discussed the same issues as were in article in their own terminology and from their own experience. Since they hadn't all read the article, it wasn't necessary to re-explain the ideological issues again in Street's language.

In the mid-term evaluations, we asked how people felt about the readings. Phil again voiced what others were feeling - a mixed message of wanting to read about things

related to their practice, but finding that the authors presented the familiar in unfamiliar academic constructs. The packaged information in academic articles was meant for another social context. It was awkward to move between the two without being somewhat intimidated by the confidence of the written text in comparison with the tentativeness of the lived experience.

David found something in an article by Susan Lytle ("Living Literacy") that raised a question in his mind about what literacy practices people actually do on their own at home or in other parts of their lives. It was something he'd always been curious about students.

> What is the relationship between what they do in the classroom around reading and writing and what they do at home or wherever it is? Cause I don't know. And I've never, you know, I guess I've asked students here and there, but I haven't done it in a formal way of having students look at what they do at home. So it just remains a question in my mind. And if I did know, how would that affect what we did in the classroom? And how much do students need to re-examine the relationship between what they do at home and what they do at school. My suspicion is that they do very little at home compared to what they do in school or certainly that they <u>feel</u> like they do very little at home compared to what they do at school. [1:2:082]

Sara the facilitator suggested that this would be a really interesting research project, because the underlying intent in our selection of some of the readings, particularly those on teacher research, was to inspire study circle participants to want to start a research project in their classes. The strategy didn't work. Dave had other concerns on his mind that didn't include replicating a research project. But there were also issues around assumptions of what research looks like.

The presence of readings like Susan Lytles' on researching Living Literacy, raised questions in people's minds about the differences between what they did as classroom teachers and what researchers did. Judy felt it had something to do with how each of them categorized information. She recognized when she read Lytle's article that she also saw literacy as skills and literacy as practice. She recognized that she was doing many research-like things in her classroom. She recognized that each of the classes she taught was a unique social context, and yet the way she was using and categorizing information in her daily practice was different from the categories an outside researcher would use to describe what was going on.

The assigned reading which everyone liked the best, was Mike Rose's Lives on the Boundary. In a sense, this book had a structure similar to our study circle. He told stories and explored many social contexts in an effort to articulate what was happening in his own lives and the lives of the students. His structure was based on stories rather than categories. Phil liked it because it was clear about how long the educational process takes and because he could see his own life reflected in the stories to a certain extent. Alex found it powerful

> because what he talked about was you're looking at this one thing and in order to look at it in any sort of accurate sense, you need to look at this stuff - The stuff that's there. And that's what happened in the classroom. It was good to have it near in a way that I could pick up and sit down and feel like I could at least try and process it more. [4:1:609]

The readings mostly stayed in the background of the study circle. They informed people who read them on a personal basis, but we didn't not spend large amounts of time discussing them. I was always in a dilemma about what to do with the

reading assignments. My personal feeling was that I was responsible to bring written resources related to our topic, but that the participants should be the ones to introduce ideas from the readings into the discussion. I felt that if the reading related to their issues, they would come up in the discussion. But if I structured the discussion around topics raised in the readings that the real issues would not come to the surface as readily. I asked for feed back when we evaluated the initial five sessions. I was curious to know if I had let people down by not integrating the readings better.

> Joan: In terms of the readings, it was funny, at each session I'd look at the syllabus and say, well, we're supposed to be reading this, and the readings did not flow together with what we were doing. What's your feelings on just having a stack of readings to look at? What things stood out that would be useful to use again? And your responses to that. It felt like I was just handing out piles of things. And they didn't integrate, but yet they had some interesting [things]. [4:1:437]

Many people commented that they would have liked to do more reading, but they were also somewhat ambivalent about it. As Phil said, "On the one hand I'd have liked to have discussed the readings more. I think that would have been useful. And I think all of them were interesting in one way or another. I think the discussion would have put us in a different context." [4:1:437]

The context he mentions is a very real and tangible thing. Discussing written texts produces a very different group feeling when compared to discussing personal experience. A different study circle group which I was facilitating at the same time chose to continue their sessions by studying a book together. Although we thought we chose a book that was relevant to everyone's situation, several people's jobs changed part

way through. The book lost its relevance and the study circle began to feel like an obligation to someone else's agenda.

In spite of our problems with using written texts, analyzing our own experience enabled us to come up with some strategies for future study circles. We agreed that it would be more useful for the group to identify a variety of recommended readings and let each person choose something that was relevant to their current experience. In this way, they could introduce ideas from the readings in the context of their personal exploration.

Responses to Writing - Keeping Journals, Logs, etc.

If it was difficult to get people to do the reading assignments, it was even more difficult to get them to do the writing assignments. Sara encountered the first resistance in the second session right after dealing with the difficulties of the word "research." There was confusion of terminology - was a journal the same as the observation log? There were questions about turning them in, keeping them in your head, sloppy handwriting, etc. It was clear from the exchange that even experienced teachers can have panic attacks when faced with written assignments. While they knew and were able to teach others the value of writing as a learning tool, they were more concerned about their own time constraints and the discipline involved in writing regularly. Although several people wrote down notes about certain things and some even wrote a full-fledged journal entry once or twice, no one kept a "journal."

We eventually acknowledged that the study circle was an "oral journal" and that I could share the transcripts with anyone who was interested. The main issue was time. They didn't have time to do everything they needed to do on the job and in life, and

therefore, journals always ended up on the back burner. Judy made an interesting comment when I asked the group to fill out a response sheet to the themes I was analyzing.

> Judy: One is that it seemed pretty long, and so I kept putting it off. But once I sat down and did it (now I'm having to redo it.) The first time I sat down and did it, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed, again, for me one of the hard things is just the reflection time, just stopping for the thinking and stuff. [9:1:028]

If I were to do a study circle again, I would try out other approaches to incorporate writing from time to time - either free writing at the beginning or end of a session, group writing or transcribing. As mentioned before, writing this dissertation has illustrated the major difference in spoken and written language. The oral record has a different energy - there is a lot of information inferred in semi-articulated sentences. It was clear to me as I searched the transcripts for quotable quotes that many of the profound things I remembered were contained in what I had "heard" the speaker say, rather than what he or she had actually "said." This is one reason why each of us used the study circle in very different ways. We were all hearing and remembering different things.

I'm not sure what impact more writing would have on the oral inquiry process. If writing were done prior to the discussion, more information would be presented to the group in pre-analyzed form rather than in partially articulated stories. If writing were done after the discussion, the writing would not document stories as much as the things learned from the group. I think there are benefits to both written and oral learning. This study circle analysis has been an exploration of oral inquiry since the written activities

did not get off the ground as planned. It would be useful to do a comparative study with a study circle that did more writing. Then again, each study circle group maybe need to make their own decisions after being given a range of options.

I have already written about how writing recontextualizes the oral conversations and creates a different kind of knowledge. For the present purposes of this study, I'm glad that we chose to pursue the oral experience rather than structuring our insights into written form. But as I look at the amount of information from the transcripts that was not included here and as I talk with former participants about what they have been doing in the past two years, we are beginning to think that a small writing project could be our next effort.

Issues of Time

Although we complain about the various constraints of time in our lives, we don't often step back and objectively analyze all of its implications. However, in reflecting on the various issues in the study circle related to time and in categorizing all of the references to time in the transcripts, I have discovered that an analysis of time gives some crucial insights into both staff development and literacy education. In fact an analysis of time calls into question many of the basic assumptions that policy-makers and funders have about how fast someone can learn to read and write, receive employment training and get placed in a job. Time is definitely one of the critical issues of the social context of literacy.

We first encountered the problems of time when we tried to organize the study circle. It took more than a year to write a grant, get funded, recruit participants and find

a time when people could attend the study circles. The fact that The Literacy Project already had a two-hour block of time every other Thursday set aside for staff development made it possible for them to work as a group, but it didn't mean that every person was able to attend every time. In fact when several of the teachers started taking courses at local colleges and the university, everything had to be renegotiated in a process more typical of what we had to do when organizing study circles for people from diverse programs.

Even though the study circle was part of regularly scheduled staff development time, it was still an issue to figure out how to make it feel like part of everyone's job description rather than an added-on burden. When we found that the discussion was just as interesting when people told stories or shared experiences that happened to be on their mind as when they reported on something they had thought about in advance and written down, we started to redefine the study circle. It became less like a class with assignments and more like an informal conversation. We realized that the two hours of the study circle could be defined as the time and place where people could do inquiry through reflection and discussion, rather than the time and place where people reported on inquiry they were trying to fit into a nonexistent time and place.

One of the real insights for me as the facilitator of the study circle was regarding how long it takes to get oriented to a project. I thought if we spread five sessions over twelve weeks that people would have time to organize their observations of some small aspect of their program. But I was coming from an academic setting where you are accustomed to filling an assignment for the teacher in that amount of time. What I hadn't

counted on was the fact that the teachers needed space and time to sort out where they were and what they were doing before they could narrow in on a project. Doing a project as an exercise for the sake of learning something interesting took a back seat to getting the lesson planned for the following day.

Time was the most frequent problem cited with the proposed study circle "research activities." From the very beginning people were concerned that either they wouldn't have time to do a research activity within the time frame or that they might want to change their focus after one session. But if not having enough time was a constraint, "timing" proved to be an even bigger challenge. For example my suggestion that Phil could tape his tutor training session to study his teaching style came too late for him to figure out how to get a tape and recorder by that evening. Pat's writing group started rising again before she could organize an analysis of why they fell apart. Dave was doing outreach for the first three sessions and didn't have a class to observe until the study circle was nearly over. Once he got started, he was able to implement ideas from earlier sessions into his new groups, but the pieces came together long after the original timeline of the original five-session study circle.

The study circle didn't have the clout of an academic program which used grades, credits and degrees to motivate people to do projects on time for the sake of a credit. Therefore, it made sense to drop the logical learning sequences demanded by "academic time" and figure out how to connect our discussion and reflections to "real-time" or the unpredictable order in which life's problems really occur.

As we were discussing how to continue the study circle after the first five sessions, I felt that it was important to continue with the flexible approach to time. There was so much tension in teachers' lives as they tried to grapple with all the things they were expected to do. As we talked about what to do next, people brought up so many things that ought to be done that it was almost overwhelming. At one point, we starting talking about how to subdivide the two-hour study circle time to deal with all the issues. Alex reminded us that the key aspect of what we enjoyed in the study circle was having the time to think and reflect. It was useful to have two hours every now and then that was not structured by things that have to be done.

Probably the most important time issue for staff development is related to the amount of time involved in moving from talk to action. Typical staff development approaches, whether they rely on top-down transmission or participatory sharing, practice and planning, all take for granted that new ideas and practices will be actively implemented by the practitioners. However, alternative approaches to staff development, such as this study circle, which continue the discussion of the ideas and strategies along with the implementation efforts, reveal that it takes a very long time to figure out how to get something started and get the adult learners involved in making it work.

Our study circle discussions documented that it took The Literacy Project over a year to redefine and put into a practice a group-based approach that included student participation in community-oriented projects and curriculum development. Of course during this time, action was happening as every site experimented with and implemented a variety of interesting learning projects. But the discussion of their efforts was still

tentative and the articulation of their theory and practice still vague. In the nearly two years following the end of the study circle, the organizational change has become substantial. Every participant who reviewed the dissertation draft commented on how far they had come since our last meetings. They were confidently doing the things in their programs that had been tentative ideas and experiments during the study circle.

In a field like adult literacy education where staff turnover is high and project funding is often limited to one or two years, it takes a truly committed organization to maintain a staff development process long enough to make an impact on program development. Community-based organizations, like The Literacy Project, are clearly the ones who are capable of broadening our vision of literacy and redefining the field of adult literacy education for the simple reason that they are taking the time to make a long term investment in their programs and in the communities they serve.

CHAPTER VII

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As practitioners, researchers and policy-makers put forth their various efforts to systematize a knowledge base and legitimize the field of adult literacy education, it is critical to recognize and build staff development upon the insights of community-based literacy practitioners who have analyzed their own experience and practice. This final chapter will summarize the insights gained from the analysis of the study circle support group and discuss the implications and recommendations they have for designing appropriate staff development strategies for community-based literacy programs.

Insights Gained From Listening to Practitioners

The key commonality in all alternative staff development approaches is that they not only rely on practitioners to identify the topics and areas of interest for staff development activities, they also encourage them to participate in the creation of new knowledge to define the field. While there is clearly a need to provide educational opportunities for practitioners to acquire the core knowledge and theories of adult learning, popular education, whole language, language acquisition, social context, and so forth, it must be acknowledged that every practitioner has already started working from a personal set of premises and has already started down the road to rediscovering and reinventing the basic theories and practices. Furthermore, whether that practitioner has never had exposure to educational theories and is inventing whole language independently with street children in Jakarta, or whether that practitioner has a doctorate in adult literacy and has been working in a program for several years, they are still

engaged in the challenging effort to discover and articulate how their own theory works in the context of real life. Staff development efforts should acknowledge and build on that common practical interest.

Staff development also implies more than providing opportunities to develop knowledge and skills related to teaching and learning in the classroom context. It also includes the on-going support and attention to the details and issues that surround the learning process. It has to be interconnected to all aspects of program development as well as to the surrounding social context. As Louise reported from her encounter with the group of people starting up new programs in Springfield, they wanted to know everything from what kind of desks and tables to what kind of philosophy. Clearly the demand for information and analysis of the details encountered in real-life practice is not being met by the standard workshop topics. For this reason, staff development strategies such as inquiry projects, mentoring and sharing groups and study circles provide an opportunity for teachers to exchange information with their peers who come from a similar context and are grappling with similar issues.

While the information generated by the study circle participants at The Literacy Project reflects the issues of a specific program at a specific point in time, it is helpful to review what types of themes emerged from their conversation and the implications such topics and themes have for what is important to consider in staff development community-based literacy education.

The Program as a Social Context

Our study circle covered a range of concerns that are seldom encountered in staff development offerings: the relationship between funding and meeting program goals, how to find a match between program philosophy and hiring new staff, finding, training and socializing volunteers into the organizational culture of the program, using the physical space to build community and develop curriculum, involving students in management and program development, creating a safe and supportive environment for learning, creating a base for taking risks, and working with other organizations in the community and participating in community development.

When such topics do get addressed, the workshop usually draws upon the experiences and resources of an expert presenter who tell others how they solved the problem, leaving minimal time for the group to discuss the complex details and strategies for their own programs. There is great need for programs to recognize the importance of setting aside regular meeting times to discuss in depth the details of their program, to see themselves as a learning organization and work out solutions to problems together. Unfortunately many programs focus on the classrooms rather than the whole program as a context for learning and do not provide opportunities for working together to develop a program wide approach.

Individual vs. Group Needs

This is an area that is more frequently addressed in staff development in workshops on how to handle multi-level classrooms, how to do portfolio assessment and how to set up group learning strategies. What is lacking in a workshop approach is an

extended period of time for practitioners to discuss the difficulties they encounter in the complex and lengthy process of implementing these strategies with each new group of learners who come into their program. Our study circle demonstrated that it is helpful to have a forum where teachers can bring up a problem they are facing in dealing with different ages, abilities, genders, cultures and interests in the same class. While workshops can be helpful to learn new techniques and strategies, the long-term process of actually creating a community of learners who can help and support each other needs on the job training, mentoring, inquiry and informal sharing and discussion with other practitioners.

Furthermore, the issues of keeping track of individual needs when a group projects begins to take over the time, helping students make transitions into, out of, and within a program and providing support for individual and group risk taking, all require a complex understanding of issues that go far beyond the usual job descriptions of teachers and yet are so interconnected with the design of learning experiences that they cannot be relegated to a program counselor. These issues need to be handled on a program level. The study circle with The Literacy Project, as well as their regular staff meetings and staff development activities provided opportunities for everyone to analyze and identify how to handle these issues through programmatic strategies such as Next Steps projects, tutoring opportunities, and so forth.

Individual Self-Confidence

All literacy practitioners are aware of the esteem and self confidence issues among the people who come to adult literacy programs. Self-esteem and adult

development and learning do get addressed in workshops. Furthermore, in recent years, there has been a lot of discussion about how to document the influence of self-confidence on learner achievement. Unfortunately, the standardized tests and popular assessment tools that are so important to centralized systems do not have the capacity to measure this important aspect of learning. Clearly, the voice of practitioners, documenting the experience of learners and pooling the knowledge of their experience, is needed to influence the knowledge base, assessment standards and funding guidelines of the field in general. The voice of experience is also needed in analyzing and creating new classroom, program and community strategies to build self-esteem and confidence.

Dealing with Expectations and the Unexpected

This area, more than any other requires alternative and responsive strategies to staff development. No amount of reading and pre-service or inservice training will prepare someone to deal with every event that will turn up in the course of literacy education. The study circle support group provided a place to talk about these issues. The mentoring process and teacher sharing groups in the Community Training for Adult and Family Literacy Project described in chapter three, provided a mechanism to deal with this both informally at the time of the experience and more formally in workshop sessions based on feedback from sharing groups. While participatory curriculum development is probably one of the most effective strategies currently being used in adult literacy, experienced as well as beginning teachers can benefit from opportunities to share ideas, strategies and problems with their peers in order to increase their capacity to envision and articulate where they are going with the learning process.

Starting New Things

In participatory curriculum development, once the learners are engaged, the learning experience or project seems to build itself with input from everyone. But it is the responsibility of the teacher to set up the situation that enables the students to participate in choosing topics or activities. One thing which the study circle provided was an opportunity for the teachers to question each other in detail about how they got a successful project started. The deeper analysis prompted by the questioning turned up small details and key pieces in the preparatory strategy that might have been overlooked if another teacher hadn't asked what happened.

In another project, I worked with teachers who were introducing a breast and cervical cancer curriculum into the adult literacy classrooms. We discovered that finding the "way in" to introduce the topic was the most critical piece of preparation that the teachers had to do (Dixon, 1993). Since community-based literacy programs are so dependent on their local context and the participation of learners in the process, the key way to provide staff development support is to provide opportunities for practitioners to analyze real experiences and to strategize how to create a similar process in their own situation. Staff development systems need to encourage and support the growing trend for practitioners to publish detailed descriptions of their work (Nash, et al, 1989; Martin; Gillespie, 1990) and for sharing groups to engage in lengthy conversations about the details of practice.

Literacy in the Social Context

Probably one of the most transforming insights of our study circle was renaming our process "doing literacy in the social context." Recognizing that the classroom doesn't have wires around it (as David expressed it), helped the group articulate their role in extending the learning process into the community. There needs to be more work done to develop and document the various ways that literacy learning can be connected to social change and community development processes.

Staff development activities can play an important role in helping practitioners redefine their role of community educators. When the learning environment extends to the community, learning and teaching strategies need to be designed to educate and/or challenge community leaders and power-holders in tandem with designing learning strategies and opportunities for the adult literacy learners. Furthermore, staff development activities can be opened up for staff from other types of organizations to help them in producing more readable and relevant reading materials and forms for the benefit everyone in the community.

When programs do literacy in the social context, classroom texts are exchanged for local materials and education becomes part of daily life rather than something relegated to schools and classrooms. The world is open for transforming the community into a learning context. But there needs to be a supportive and informed staff and program development process as well as a broader definition of literacy in the field to support this. Literacy in the social context opens up a whole new range of skills for the literacy practitioners including how to analyze community power and political structures,

how to become involved in community meetings, how to coach learners from the wings, how to prepare community people to work with students in a new situation, how to help learners offer their skills and strengths in community service, how to provide a place for community issues to be discussed and analyzed in preparation for action, how to link with other community organizations, and so forth.

Insights About How Practitioners Articulate Theory and Practice

In addition to expanding the range of what kinds of topics and issues should be contained in staff and program development activities, my analysis of the study circle support group also provided insights into how practitioners talk about their work and express their ideas and theories. While the existing style and language of university research and intellectual writing are important to the development of the field, they have an intimidating influence on dictating how knowledge should be categorized and described. The findings of this study indicate that practitioners have very different ways of articulating theory and practice. Paying attention to the ways practitioners describe their experiences can expand narrow conceptions of theory to include the multi-layered process of building practical theories within a particular educational context.

Staff development strategies need to ensure that the voice of practitioners is not overpowered by the academic voice. It is critically important for a teacher to be able to describe in their very local, very tentative way how they are in fact putting into practice something as high-sounding as exploring "the context of authentic dialogue between learners and educators as equally knowing subjects" (Freire, 1985). Staff development activities should also provide a forum where practitioners can analyze and discuss how to

blend their learning theories and educational strategies with the expectations, input and abilities of students within the context of their continually changing learning environment.

When practitioners talk about their practice and their issues of concern, they combine many forms of talk including story telling, hypothesis forming, self-observation, problem solving, strategy analysis, meaning making and topic discussion. This mixture of strategies for examining practice results in a rich, contextualized analysis of real-life problems that is very different from the case studies or ideal situations which are used to demonstrate new skills and techniques. It is one thing to attend a well planned workshop on process writing. It is a totally different experience to figure out how to support a mixed group of learners working together at different levels and distracted by different problems during the course of writing their first letter to the editor. When practitioners share their real experiences, the complexity is acknowledged and validated. A door is opened to talk about the real issues and to theorize about how to solve real problems. The techniques look different in real life. The time is much longer. And there are many subtle details that were missed in the well-organized guidelines.

It is important to draw upon the ways practitioners talk about their practice in creating a knowledge base and designing staff development activities for the field of adult literacy education. First of all, stories are important. The theories and creative strategies grow out of reflecting on experience and sharing stories and anecdotes. A theoretical article from the academic world needs to be tested and rearticulated by describing it in terms of daily life practice. But even more important, real practice needs

to be shared and analyzed in order to articulate the emergent and embedded theories that are contained in actions, power struggles, unexplained problems and successes. Finally, there needs to be generous allowance for the articulation to be vague and tentative. To name something as whole language or participatory research gives the impression that more is known than is really known. Practice and theory cannot be pulled apart and labeled until they can be clearly described with a successful story, and then it must be recognized that next time the theory and practice will have to be mixed in a very different way.

Similarities in Findings of Alternative Staff Development Approaches

While the study circle support group has its own unique characteristics, it also shares some things in common with other alternative approaches to staff development. As mentioned earlier, the Adult Literacy Participant Inquiry Project (ALPIP) in the Philadelphia area identified several categories of questions which were important to practitioners participating in a staff development seminar. The five categories of questions they identified included general questions about the practice of teaching adults and how to improve teaching; questions related to self-evaluation and how to reflect on and critique one's own practice; questions focused on program concerns such as administration, philosophies, evaluation strategies and staff development; questions related to current research issues in the field such as the meaning of learner-centered or the debates around phonics; and questions about the fundamental assumptions that underlie goals, politics, and policies in the field such as race, class and gender issues and conflicting beliefs about teaching and learning.

Although participants in the study circle did not identify specific questions and pursue an in-depth inquiry, a review of the topics and themes covered during the study circle sessions, reveals an interest in many of the same questions and categories. Study circles provide an opportunity for practitioners to engage in oral inquiry on a range of issues directly related to their practice. In the case of The Literacy Project, the social context of literacy provided a wide-ranging topic that had implications for all levels and areas of practice. Study circles can also be organized around much narrower questions and issues for group inquiry. They can also be used as a sharing forum for practitioners engaged in individual inquiry projects.

The essential difference between inquiry projects based on a specific question and study circles in that the practitioner inquiry projects provide a support system for participants to explore a specific question in depth, while the study circle provides a setting for participants to collaboratively explore and reflect on a range of issues that come up in the course of their practice. In the case of The Literacy Project, the study circle agenda was dependent on and reflective of the issues and concerns that the participants were facing during a transitional time in their program. The study circle format was flexible enough to allow individual and group interests to shift along with the emerging process of the program rather than imposing commitment to a particular inquiry topic.

In choosing between a focused inquiry project and the broader oral inquiry of a study circle, practitioners should examine their own needs and interests in terms of their professional and programmatic development. The study circle format provides a space

for reflection that is concurrent with the implementation of practice. The inquiry projects, on the other hand, assist the participants to focus on a particular area or theme that is particularly important and look for patterns, questions, issues that will give them insight into improving their practice in that area. In both types of staff development approaches, the participants have an opportunity to get support, learn about what others are doing and share doubts and questions as well as ideas and insights.

Sharing meetings seem to be an important commonality in all forms of alternative staff development approaches. Whether the practitioners are involved in inquiry projects, study circles or staff development programs for new teachers; sharing meetings provide a forum for making connections between personal theories, experience, new ideas and research in the field, information about new techniques, etc. In the Community Training for Adult and Family Literacy Project (CTALP) described in Chapter III, sharing meetings were used to link topics and issues between the training workshop and actual work in the program sites. The first activity on their sharing meeting agenda was a report back where each person briefly told what they did in class in the past week. Practitioner inquiry support groups and study circles also begin with some form of report back or update from each of the participants to set the stage for the meeting.

The significance of beginning alternative staff development approaches with each participant sharing information, is that the focus for the group session is then built from authentic experience rather than expert agendas. Even when the group facilitator may have prepared a topic for exploration in advance, the real issues that come forward during the reporting session have an impact on how that topic is addressed. The planned

topic may even be supplanted in cases where something compelling comes up in the report out session. When theoretical discussions take place, real experience provides the foundation for the critique and development of practical theory.

Finally, most alternative staff development approaches recognize that implementing new teaching approaches, collecting information about practice, developing new theories and approaches, in short, implementing any effort to improve practice and program structure, is going to take a significant amount of time. Therefore, alternative approaches are designed for multiple sessions over an extended period of time. Because of this, practitioners, researchers and staff development workers engaged in these alternative forms have a much more realistic understanding of the time and commitment necessary to facilitate learning and organizational change.

Guiding Principles for Designing Staff Development and Support

In keeping with the tradition set by other researchers on effective staff development, it is appropriate that I conclude with a set of guiding principles for designing staff development experiences and support for community-based literacy practitioners. I have organized the principles to respond to the three questions I asked in Chapter III. How can practitioners participate in guiding staff development and creating a knowledge base for the field? How can a non-linear staff development process be designed? and Is it possible to create functioning systems and/or organizations to provide context, continuity and purpose for staff development?

1. How can practitioners participate in guiding staff development and creating a knowledge base for the field?

a) Staff development should reinvent old theories and build new theories from reflection on actual practice: the knowledge base should be built from the field and articulated in language and stories that are meaningful and useful to practitioners. Of course there is a place for introducing practitioners to theories they are not familiar with, but new ideas should not be imposed. They should be experimented with in the programs and rearticulated in terms of the local context. Every practitioner needs to participate in the process of articulating their own theory and practice in their own words and actions.

b) Staff development should focus on problem posing and solving rather than topic discussion: Adult literacy is an applied field. Knowing about the social context of literacy is not as important as knowing how to develop a literacy program that is integrated in, participating in, drawing information from, helping people survive in, and trying to help change a real local context. Staff development activities should start from practitioners identifying their issues and problems and work with them to create solutions and knowledge about how to do literacy.

2. How can a non-linear staff development process be designed?

a) Staff development should be based on authentic experience: According to Myles Horton, "academic people quite often don't want authenticity. They want some kind of synthesis that takes the experience a little bit away, so it'll be more bearable to them, I suppose" (Bell, et al., 1990, p. 168). When workshops and seminars synthesize

skills and techniques into neat packages and step-by-step procedures, they give a false impression of how easy things are and how long they takes to do. Every staff development activity needs to include sufficient time for talking about how things look in real practice. People need to be able to ask questions like, what are the level of your students? How long did it take to build up to this activity? What was the key thing that you did? They also need to be able to share their own experiences and analyze them together. Authentic experience doesn't happen in order, it doesn't move at a predictable pace, and it requires people to develop skills for dealing with the unexpected. These are the skills that community-based literacy practitioners need in order to work in partnership with learners in the complexity of the real world.

b) Staff development should be embedded in the social context of actual programs: Since adult literacy learners need to deal with a range of literacy issues from their social context, community-based programs should design learning experiences and materials to deal with local issues. Therefore, staff development activities need to provide opportunities for practitioners to examine local situations, solve problems, develop curriculum and initiate learning projects in ways that are locally relevant.

c) Staff development should be on-going and flexible in order to incorporate emerging issues in the content: If you start with authentic experience, you cannot solve the problems in one workshop. Therefore, approaches to staff development that provide on-going sharing sessions, inquiry groups, study circles, mentoring support, etc. are better suited to figuring out the details and strategies. However, on-going sessions run the risk of becoming mismatched with the rhythm and flow of literacy practice if they do not

have built-in flexibility to respond to emerging needs and interests. It's appropriate to change goals, divide a group, or move in a new direction if participants are losing energy rather than gaining energy from their interactions.

3. Is it possible to create functioning systems and/or organizations to provide a context, continuity and purpose for Staff Development?

a) Staff development should have program development as its goal: Every program should set aside time for everyone on the staff to get together on a regular basis and talk about their individual and joint efforts. Staff development time should include a variety of approaches depending on the needs of the staff at different times in their career. Workshops on topics of interests, inquiry projects, and other activities should be chosen to improve the quality of the program. And certainly, I would recommend a time and place where the conversation can develop its own course--to tell stories, ask questions, form hypotheses and make meaning in any way the participants choose so that they can learn to articulate the theory and practice of their own programs.

b. Staff development should connect programs to a larger system that is working for structural change in the education system: The structural change effort should not be focused on merely professionalizing the field of adult literacy education. It should be working for change in government policies and social structures that limit the opportunities and options for adult literacy learners.

Conclusion

In spite of the efforts of studies like this one which promote alternatives for more effective staff development, the reality remains that the field of adult literacy education

is still overlooked and underfunded. Policy-makers still assume that adult illiteracy is a temporary problem that will eventually be eliminated as better K-12 improvements are implemented. As long as literacy education is seen as a temporary solution, there will be no motivation to make an investment in staff or program development in the field.

Given the fact that there is an enormous and growing need for basic literacy education; it falls to the practitioners, staff development workers, researchers and government bureaucrats who are already committed to the field to advocate for better policies, funding and structural commitment. Alternative staff development efforts can play a role in improving the field if the organizers and participants make deliberate connections between improved educational practices in the classrooms and program development, community development and broader social change. The Literacy Project staff's effort to use the study circle to articulate the theories and strategies for doing literacy in the social context of the local communities where they work, provides a model for one way that a staff development approach can be designed to facilitate this process.

Information generated by practitioner inquiry, study circles, sharing groups and staff development programs needs to be organized and utilized in advocacy efforts. Although the process of structural change in the field of adult literacy is long and complex because it is interconnected with all of the social constructs that contribute to poverty, economic stagnation and marginalization of minority groups, the essential philosophy of adult education is rooted in empowering people to participate in social change. It is expedient that staff and program development in this field also be built on the same principles and practices advocated for working with adult literacy learners.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESPONSE TO DRAFT THEMES

Dear Study Circle Participant,

I am writing a summary of our study circle experience and would appreciate your comments on the following topics. They come from a framework developed by Susan Lytle and Marilyn Cochran-Smith. I think they open up some interesting issues to think about. Attached is a rough draft of the summary I am working on for you to see and respond to some of my interpretations. I would appreciate any comments and suggestions you can give me about these topics and issues.

Thanks

1. TIME:
What are your insights or concerns related to organizing time for and during the study circle?

What are your responses to the issues I have identified in the summary related to organizing time for staff development for ABE and ESL teachers?

What issues do you feel are important for others to consider in organizing the time for a study circle?

2. TALK:
Comment on how you feel about your participation in the talk that went on in the study circle, what did you get out of it, how did you use it?

What is your response to the issues I identified in the summary for organizing/facilitating talk in a study circle support group?

What issues do you feel are important for others to consider in facilitating talk in a study circle?

3. TEXT:
Comment on your feelings and insights about the use of different texts in our study circle.

What issues do you feel are important for others to consider in selecting and using texts in a study circle support group?

4. TASK:
How did you use the study circle for your own professional or personal growth?

What did you see as the task of the study circle?

What issues do you feel are important for others to consider in defining the task of a study circle?

APPENDIX B
SYLLABUS FOR STUDY CIRCLE

Social Context of Learning
Curriculum Outline for Study Circle

Session 1: Introduction to Social Context and Teacher Research

Introduction: What is social context?

1. Develop a group list of elements/categories of things that would be in a person's social context.

2. Brainstorm layers of social context that affect teachers and students
Personal social context of teacher
Social contexts of students
Social context within classroom
Context of program surrounding classroom

Activity: Mapping your classroom's social context

1. Making Maps: An important key to researching is learning to look at things with an observant eye. This activity uses maps as a metaphor for identifying things and understanding what we are looking at. If we want to begin researching our own teaching, sometimes, we need a map. Take about 10 minutes and make an activity map of your class. You can make a physical map (showing chairs, tables, etc and label things according to what activities happen there) or a social map (showing how the group of learners interact with you and each other for different activities) or you can make a time map (showing what kinds of activities happen at different times). You can represent things on your map in any way you choose.

2. Sharing maps: Have each person share map with group.

Discussion: How can you apply the concept of social context to your classroom teaching? How could you use mapping activities to teach reading and writing?

Application: Choose a social context research activity to try out in your classroom before the next session. Bring map or notes next time for the discussion.

1. Practitioner research - observe some aspect of social context in your classroom. map or describe it.

2. Collaborative research - share the ideas of social context and mapping with your students. Have them make social context maps (classroom, neighborhood, community, etc.) Use maps to develop a writing activity.

Reading: 1. Lytle, Susan. "Living Literacy: Rethinking Development in Adulthood." version of a paper presented at AERA, Boston, MA 1990
2. Observation Log Handout

Session 2: **Learning from the Social Context - applications and implications for improving our teaching. Part 1.**

Sharing: Each person tells about the social context research activity they did in their classroom. Shares maps or notes with group.

Facilitator makes lists:
1. Various applications and new ideas identified by group during the sharing and discussion that people may want to try out in the future.

2. Problems or questions that were identified by mapping activity that may form the basis of an ongoing research activity for an individual or the group.

Analysis: Has to grow out of the discussion. Possibilities would include additional ways to look at issues more deeply or ways to continue a line of inquiry. Categorize the things on the two lists. What kinds of things are beyond the scope of what is normally called curriculum that have an impact on your teaching? e.g. child-care issues, administrative problems, transportation, etc.

Research Tools: Journal keeping for teachers. Discuss the value of teachers writing about their practice. Address the issue of time - when and how to do the writing and make it a part of lesson planning.

Application: Practice keeping a journal about some aspect of your teaching that fits into the broadly defined area of social context. You can include maps and diagrams as part of the journal. You can incorporate the journal into your classroom teaching. The students can also keep journals on the same or related topics. Bring journal next time.

Reading: Start Lives on the Boundary by Mike Rose

Session 3: **Learning from the Social Context - applications and implications for improving our teaching. Part 2.**

Sharing: Report on journal keeping assignment.

Rather than narrate everything you wrote, try to focus on one interesting insight from doing the activity. What did you learn about the social context of your classroom? What did you learn about your students? yourself? your teaching?

Discussion: If we define curriculum as creating the conditions that make learning possible, what does that mean for how we approach lesson and curriculum planning? Relate personal experience and ideas to ideas from reading assignment

Activity: Each person makes two lists for their social context on flip chart paper: a) things that promote/enable learners to acquire literacy and other educational skills. and b) things that hinder learners from acquiring these skills.

Report lists to rest of group for feedback response.

Application: Select something from one of your lists that you want to learn more about. Keep a journal about what you observe, ask students to write about it for a classroom assignment, interview students or have them interview each other, talk to other teachers or administrators about it. Keep notes, bring the information next time.

Reading: 1. Read excerpt from introduction to Theory and Practice by Brian Street about the autonomous vs the ideological model for literacy.

2. Continue reading Lives on the Boundary by Mike Rose

3. Oberg, Antoinette. "Methods and Meanings in Action Research: The Action Research Journal." Theory into Practice. Columbus, Ohio, Summer 1990. pp 214-221.

Session 4: **Learning from the Social Context - The world of our students and its influence on our classroom.**

Sharing: Share what you learned about the topic you observed, interviewed and wrote about.

Analysis: Force Field Analysis. Demonstrate how to use it looking at a case of helping a particular student from Lives on the Boundary. Start with autonomous factors, then expand to include ideological (social context) factors. Compare and discuss the differences of insights from looking at case from two perspectives.

Activity: Divide into groups and have everyone apply force field analysis to analyzing their topic.

Discussion: Report on results and insights gained from using force field analysis to look at own situation.

Application: Try making change in classroom? Continue keeping journal and mapping classroom. For next week, look at your context as a teacher - the program you work for, your time schedule, your work load, stability or instability of job, etc.

Reading: 1. Smith, Dorothy. "IV. Ideology and Work in the Experience of a Single Parent: Sketching an Institutional Ethnography." from Chapter 4 in The Everyday World as Problematic. Boston: Northeastern University Press. 1987.

Session 5: Learning from the Social Context - The world of adult basic education and its influence on our classroom.

Sharing: Teacher's context: your feelings about work load, job stability, life pressures, etc. Lindy will share the information she has collected about the social context of our study circle and how various factors from participants lives have played a part in our staff development process.

Analysis: List and categorize issues for teachers. Make a list of things that enable teachers to work effectively and a list of things that hinder teachers from working effectively.

Activity: As a group, choose one thing from the list and do a force field analysis of factors that could help change it.

Application: Make plans for whether or how we want to continue.

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